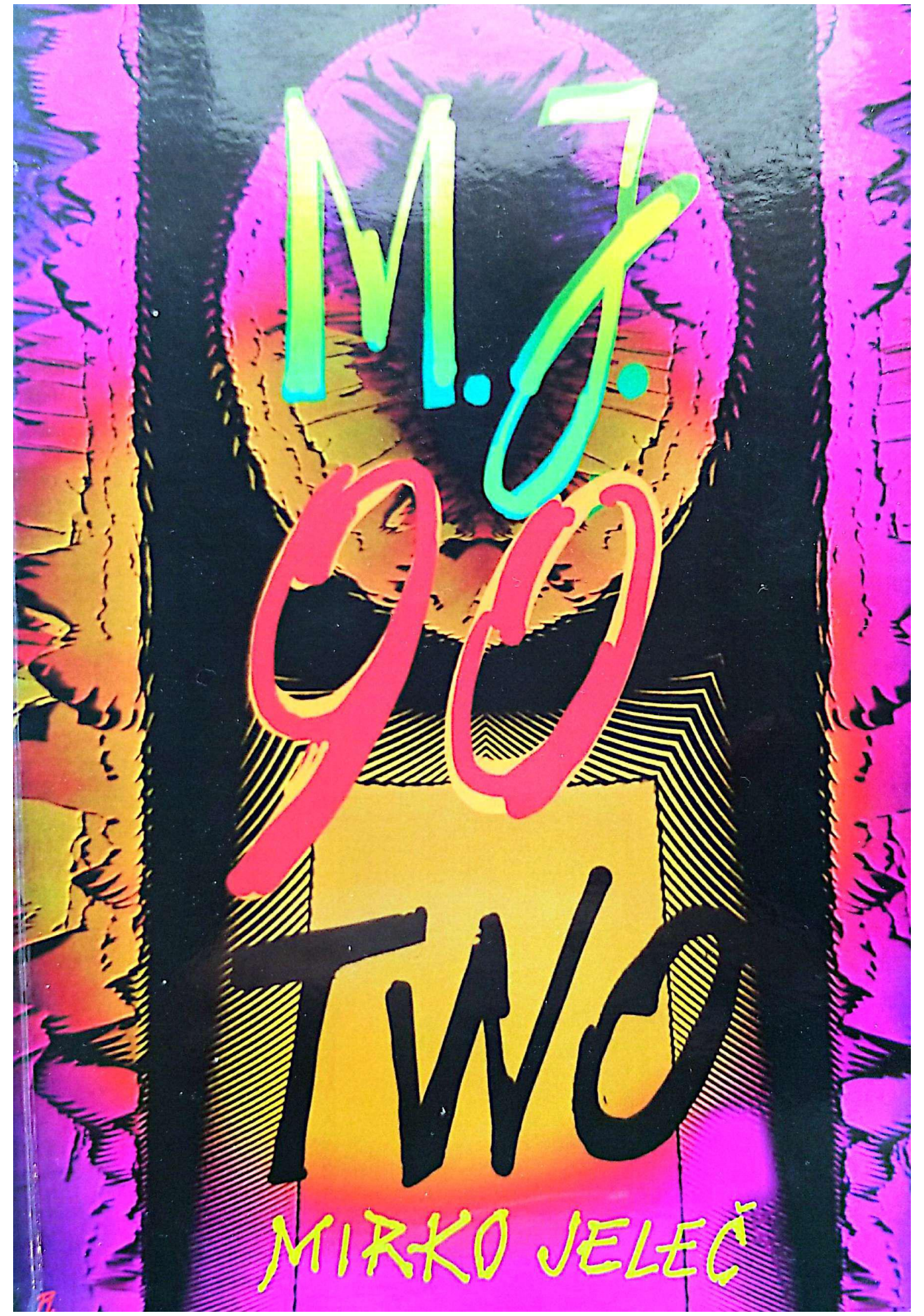
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The Usora Public Library published this book on a significant anniversary: 800 years since the first written mention of Usora. The name derives from the eponymous river, and the Usora was cited in a historic document on May 15th, 1225. At that time, it was a feudal land of the medieval Bosnian Kingdom.

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"When war breaks out, the first casualty is the truth"

The truth was the first casualty even before nineteen ninety-two, and with the start of the war it turned into a pamphlet of propaganda and hid behind nationalist flags. Viewed at a historical distance of 30 years, it was expected that the truth would be freed from its chains and would step out of its closed archives. Unfortunately, this is not the case! It is still a prisoner and silenced. We still live in a time of three truths, and an illusion of truth. Her surrogates, assisted by harangues from the media, interpret the elapsed time only in the atmosphere of their national bastions. This book of documentary prose is written with the intention of recording the unadulterated and genuine truth for generations who will be more tolerant, cleverer, and more ready to differentiate the causes and effects of war. The story nestles itself into the Doboj landscape, but any of these stories could also carry the name of any other Bosnian and Herzegovinian town because however different the surrogates of truth are, the fate of humans is always similar. Man and his own humanity, faced with the absurdity of ninety-two, were undoubtedly the victims of nationalism and of an unnecessary war. For this ordinary man-victim, it was worth writing this book.

Military Training on Becanj (I)

"Stanković! Stanković, stop!" called the TV reporter.

The military jeep with visible Yugoslav People's Army insignia stopped and a large officer in a camouflage uniform stepped in front of them.

"Major, we were headed to the post office relay. They wouldn't let us pass!" the engineer from the post office reported.

"They were even shooting at us!" added the TV reporter, just in case the officer hadn't heard it.

Major Stanković was surprised by this meeting in this unexpected location, but he wouldn't show it:

"I don't know who shot at you! But it wasn't my unit..."

This story actually started a day earlier after a surprise phone call.

"Hey mate! There's no more Yutel!" **(See Endnote II)**

In Miralem's call the echo of questions rang as well. What happened? Why did Goran Milić disappear from the screen last night? Half the town, inhabitants of Pijeskovi suburb and the suburban neighbourhood Bare, and all the places to the north of Doboj had suddenly lost the TV signal emitted by TV Sarajevo and Yutel. After fleeing the capital city which had been inflamed by the "Memorandum" and the national euphoria, Yutel had to broadcast from the Sarajevo studio. The local telephones started working, and it was discovered straight away that the antennas turned towards Becanj were to blame for the cut transmission. Up until then it had been the best relay, with the biggest choice of channels. At the time when the whole country sat in front of their screens and awaited in fear for the news broadcasting net-works which were a source of information and hope for their own futures, it was a privilege to be able to watch Yutel and both channels coming from TV centres of the Republics, from Sarajevo, Belgrade and Zagreb. Every evening it would bring something new that would exacerbate concerns, uncertainty, and trembling in front

of the TV screens. By flicking through the channels, one searched in vain for a tiny grain of hope from the dimming of warmongering euphoria.

"Mate, my friends from Bare and Pijeskovi told me that they can only watch TV Belgrade now!" Miralem was anxious. "The other channels are gone! Here is a job for you and your investigative journalism!"

The "investigation" began in the café "At Aljo's", in the neighbourhood of "Stadion" where the correspondents of TV Sarajevo were based. The morning coffee was followed by an update and exchange of information on the events from the night before. In the small town the echoes of shooting could be heard on a nightly basis, and often right before dawn the sleepy and traumatised working class would be woken by an explosion. First the kiosks were mined, then cake shops and fruit and vegetable shops owned by Albanians, then came objects and cars owned by Muslims and Croats who were members of the political party Party of Democratic Action (Bosniak) and Croatian Democratic Union (Croats). In the suburb of Pijeskovi, a new Renault had exploded, owned by Dr. Miroslav Ratančić, the director of the Doboj branch of the Croatian Cultural Society "Napredak".

"This just isn't normal!" Saša noted, the director of the Technical Department of the Doboj Post Office. "Our facility, our post office relay is on Becanj! Any access to it is prohibited, it's all gated! No one can get in!"

"Looks like they can!" Mirko added, the young newspaper correspondent for Radio Sarajevo, not losing his morning vigour.

"Saša, owls don't sleep. Your relay has had some night time visitors!"

"Someone must have broken in and changed the frequencies!" Rade joined in, the cameraman from the Correspondent Office of TV Sarajevo.

"I have the keys to our facility on Becanj," Saša continued. "If you guys want, we can go together to the relay, to check out what's going on."

They sat in the old "Lada", a Russian vehicle brand, the official car of the Sarajevo Radio and Television Network. Goran drove, nicknamed Lun because of his nightlife. He was a reliable driver and the sound engineer for the Correspondent Office. Brotherhood and unity in the car! They still weren't counting their national blood cells, and many years later, with a time traveller's viewpoint to the twentieth century, they discovered a coincidence to which they hadn't paid attention, nor given any thought. Up the hill, on the well-maintained macadam road, headed towards the post office relay, they

were a physical representation of the national structure of Bosnia: Two Serbs, one Croat, and one Muslim!

Behind a bend, towards the relay facility, there was a barbed wire barrier on the road. In front of the knotted wire, a soldier stood in camouflage uniform, with no insignia, with an automatic gun held in both arms. He wore a balaclava and only his eyes were visible.

"You can't go further! Turn around!" He yelled at them.

"I'm an engineer from the post office! This is our post office relay. I have to get to the building!"

"No one can reach the building! Go back!" The masked guy threatened them. His Kalashnikov was now aimed at their chests.

They got back in the car in disbelief, as if it were happening to someone else, like a movie, not to them! Lun was the most chilled out, he successfully turned the car around on the narrow road. Then they could hear the shooting! They were in his sights, he could've shot them, unarmed as they were, but he didn't. These shots were a warning!

That was their first encounter with war, which would, in the golden valley of their hometown, start a few months later. Goran pressed on the accelerator, the car zoomed down the hill, bouncing on the bumps on the road. When they drove far away enough, they stopped on a wider part of the road and, collectively mute, left the "Lada" to check if they were alive and to check the car for bullet holes.

In that moment, from a side road, out of nowhere, a military van rode out. The driver was an army policeman with white straps, and next to him was a moustached officer with a camouflage cap on his head. It was major Milovan Stanković!

"They shot at us!" Rade yelled out. He knew the major well. Often, during peace times, while the major was a lower ranking official, Rade had filmed military events and ceremonies for the evening news report.

Although taken aback by the meeting with them on the macadam road towards Becanj, major Stanković was clear:

"I don't know who they are! I have military training nearby!" He indicated vaguely towards the forest to the right. "I don't know who is at the top of the relay."

Later on, time would tell that those at the relay were, in fact, his men!

The training for the start of the war had been successful!

The media serving war propaganda arrived via Becanj to Doboj. The news of the seized transmitter was announced firstly by Radio Sarajevo, then on the central news report of TV Sarajevo, and the following day in the newspaper "Oslobođenje". Correspondents from Doboj who collaborated with, and broadcast for, the Belgrade daily newspapers also sent information about the event, but the news of the seized relay at Becanj wasn't published.

A few months later, thoroughly prepared by the media, a real war began in Bosnia.

(I) The hill Becanj is located to the north-east side of the Doboj valley. At the top, famous for the nickname "Ciganište" (the gypsy spot), at 566 metres above sea level, there was the communications relay, as well as radio and TV repeaters and transmitters of the antenna network. This place had extraordinary significance during peace time, and especially during war time, in transporting signals for services for public communication. Immediately before the war, on the 4th of February 1992, an armed formation under the command of major Milovan Stanković seized Becanj and redirected the frequencies of TV Sarajevo and TV Zagreb to those exclusively belonging to TV Belgrade.

The role of the media in preparation for the war is indisputable. The process began when Milošević wanted to reckon with the party comrades, and when the take-over of government and the change-over of staff in the Serbian media occurred. In the period from 1988 to the beginnings of the wars in Croatia and Bosnia, 1500 journalists and technicians in Serbia lost their jobs for not being "on the lines". The complete editorial structure of *Politika* was changed, 70 editors were made redundant, and a similar "cleansing" occurred in [the papers] *Politika Ekspres, Večernje novosti,* Radio Belgrade, and TV Belgrade. There was a take-over of the Journalist Association of Serbia and the then-president Jug Grizelj was immediately fired. The following papers were discontinued: *NON* (Independent Youth Newspaper), *Mladost* (Youth), and *Student*. Journals with high circulation numbers, *Duga* (Rainbow) and *Svet* (The World), and in particular the magazine NIN, the most respected weekly magazine in Serbia, underwent a huge transformation and became the ideological henchmen of Slobodan Milošević and his national program based on the "Memorandum" created by The Serbian Academy of Arts and Sciences. The awakening of "national consciousness" in the media heated up the revoke of the autonomy of Kosovo and Vojvodina, by the so-called anti-bureaucratic revolution "happenings of the people" organized by authorities in power. After taking over the daily and weekly newspapers, radio, and television, the next ones to find themselves facing a change of personnel were the illustrated print media with largest circulation: *Ilustrovana politika* (Illustrated Politics), *TV Novosti* (TV News), and even *Politikin zabavnik* (Politica's Entertainer) [children's magazine]! The politics of the editors in all the media outlets followed the political course without a complaint! From the beginning of his political take-over, Milošević understood the importance of the media, and used them to their full potential, kept them on tenterhooks, and would personally choose and set up newspaper editors, editors of informative programs, especially radio and TV editors. After replacing the head and most

important editors from Radio Belgrade and TV Belgrade, the employees of these media protested and were against Milošević's changes to the media personnel, but their protests were crushed by repression, protesters were fired, and the war flared up as a result of such actions. With his personnel, who responded to his wishes at the wink of his eye, the media were put in the service of the war inflicting steps by spreading hatred, tendentious and false information. All the known propaganda techniques were used, from Stalin's to Goebbel's, drawing heavily on myths from the past, which in reality was a manipulation of historical facts, with the constantly repeated mantra of the victimisation of the Serb people. Based on the ideas of the "Memorandum", public opinion was mobilised in shaping a national consensus. The media was used as a weapon of war for the purposes of realising political goal "all Serbs in one country", but also for a strategic goal: ethnic cleansing and the acquisition of new territories by force!

The media gave significant support in affirming and promoting the Serbian Orthodox Church, which played a decisive part in the "awakening of national consciousness" by carrying of the remains of the late King Lazar from monastery to monastery, thus encircling the borders of the "regions of the Serb countries". The church, thanks to its use of media space, stepped out of its religious role, and held a central place in informative centres and bred the apotheosis of the Serbs as the "heavenly people". The final deviance from religion was in the act of blessing the tanks that would go from Belgrade to demolish Vukovar!

A detailed analysis of the political propaganda and the project "All Serbs in One Country", at the request of the International Prosecution Tribunal during the trial of Slobodan Milošević, was done by Renaud de La Brosse, a professor at the University of Reims Champagne – Ardenne, and can be found on this webpage: https://www.icty.org/x/cases/slobodan_milosevic/prosexp/bcs/rep-serb-b.htm

In this essay, among other things, the author attempts to answer the question – how and why did the public in Serbia accept everything as presented to them? "A lack of information, or rather, one-sided information, is an explanation for the obedience of the Serb masses to the nationalist regime and politics, whose criminal character they didn't comprehend; the population, whether they chose not to see what was going on, or they accepted official sources of information as true and reliable, was kept and maintained in ignorance of what was really going on in the federal republics and in Serbia itself, and had the psychological dispositions to believe in every lie."

Right up to the beginning of the "Log Revolution" in Lika, and the subsequent beginnings of war in Slovenia and Croatia, the media was flooded with articles about "the historical injustices inflicted on the Serb people", with the direct aim of inciting Serb nationalism, announcing a future war aim to "create a new Yugoslavia as a nation for all Serbs and others who want to join in".

The sources of public information became "the most loyal servants of nationalist parties in power", and the nationalist propaganda shaped public opinion for war, as well as indirectly acting as a warmongering initiator committed to inflaming violence and crime. Nenad Pejić, a pre-war editor for TV Sarajevo, later the director of the programme *Slobodna evropa* (Free Europe) in our language, fairly reasoned that without the media, especially television, it wouldn't have been possible to imagine, let alone realise, war in ex-Yugoslavia.

The Counter-Intelligence forces of the Yugoslav People's Army, in preparation for the war in Bosnia and Croatia, knew that the conflicts were connected to the control of information and communications. As they couldn't control or dose the information of the Croatian and Bosnian media, in that instance it wasn't enough to conduct only propaganda activities, but it was also necessary, wherever possible, to silence the voice of "the other side". Thus, under the commandment of the Yugoslav People's Army, the most important TV-relays were turned off, as well as the programs: Yutel, TV Sarajevo, and TV Zagreb.

This has been written about in a detailed study analysis by Sonja Biserko, an activist for human rights in Serbia, who we are quoting here, and who can be found on the portal of the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights: https://www.helsinki.org.rs/serbian/doc/Uloga%20medija.doc

"A unique form of centralisation of the media policy, especially in electronic media, was the take-over of the relays on Kozara, Bijeljina, Doboj, and Prijedor, which had been done already in October or November of 1991. This way the complete manipulation of control was guaranteed over the Serbian population, or the public opinion, in the so called RSK, RS... The TV programs emitted by RTS, RTV and the TV of Novi Sad that were themselves under the control of the Serb forces, the Yugoslav People's Army, could be viewed and what was going on in parts of Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina could be watched on these TV programs. This was achieved by occupying the TV relays across the territories under Serb control, including the relay on Kozara, which was the most important one. This relay was taken by the paramilitary formation "The Wolves", which functioned in total col-

laboration with the military and political leadership. As a result of this, citizens in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia couldn't watch programs from Sarajevo or Zagreb, but only the programs from Serbia, Pale, or Banja Luka."

Manipulating lies was considered a legitimate way of accomplishing the so-called "just goals". It was the time of escalation and triumph of misinformation, the falsification of truth and fabrication of lies, withholding key pieces of information from the public, and the production of fake news... These were the darkest years and the twilight of journalism as an honourable profession. TV transmitters and relays which were taken over by the Yugoslav People's Army in 1991 were the first to be targeted during the NATO air bombings in 1995 when the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina had already ended. (On Becanj, during the destruction of the transmitter in 1995, on the 7th of September, unfortunately only ordinary civilians suffered casualties, Bosniaks and Croats from Doboj, who had been under threat from the military and forced into a work obligation to dig trenches.)

Despite the evident and undeniable influence of the media, journalists, and editors on the events before the war, as well as crimes committed during the war, none of the "paid cronies" of the media has been taken to court or held accountable for such crimes. On the contrary, brainwashing, hate-speech, and nationalism cloaked in the gown of the "victimhood of the Serbs", and used for nationalist homogeneity, has continued long after the conflicts. In fact, today, 30 years after the war, the sounds of nationalism are as loud as they were before the war. They echo with the sounds of brass and drums, the sound of the war cry.

(II) Yutel was an attempt at establishing an inclusive, supranational television network which the president of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia's government, Ante Marković, supported. The idea was for the nation to have an alternative, unbiased source of information during a time of ostracised republican media and awakening of national consciousness. However, there wasn't enough appreciation and support from the civilian and military structures for this idea, so instead of being a Yugoslav TV channel with the all-day broadcasting, Yutel ended up being a one-hour TV program with a modern design, leisurely and eloquently broadcast as the evening news on the Second channel of TV Sarajevo. According to the principle of "the national key" for equal representation of people of different nationalities, the program was created by the editors Goran Milić, Gordana Suša, Dževad Sabljaković, Velibor Čović, and Zekerijah Smajić. Its broadcast started on the 23rd of October 1990 from the building of Radio Television Sarajevo with

the famous sentence by the host Goran Milić, "Good evening, Yugoslavia!" The main goal of Yutel was the unbiased reporting of events, and the awakening of national hopes and beliefs in Yugoslav collectivism. However, from the very beginnings, Yugoslavia, or rather, its republics, weren't predisposed to it. Yutel's influence in Croatia was minimised, while in Serbia it was openly sabotaged, because the Serb authorities demanded the dismantling of its mobile transmitters on the territory of Serbia. The offices of Yutel in Belgrade were demolished, and the employees were abused by the extremist right wing movement of "The White Eagles".

Yutel's daily program reported about the events leading to the collapse of Yugoslavia and brought insight into the growing violence and absurdity which began happening more frequently in the republics. A young soldier with a masked helmet will forever be remembered by his response to the news reporter regarding the beginning of the war in Slovenia: "They, like, want to separate, and we like, won't let them." And this young soldier who was pushed into war, as well as Yutel itself, were the naïve attempts at saving a country (which was needed by everyone and wasn't needed by anyone.) When the war moved from Croatia to Bosnia, the TV studios followed the attack on Sarajevo, and soon after Goran Milić formally announced that Yutel was going to stop reporting in the media on the 12th of May 1992.

The final end of Yugoslavia followed closely after the end of Yutel.

How the War Started in Minka's Building

It was anxious in the basement, but outside it was even worse. The roses bloom in May, the buds were about to flower, but one's eyes weren't excited for the colours of spring. On the eve of the anniversary of Tito's death, the 3rd of May 1992, in the early hours of the morning, gunfire could be heard and the "liberators" entered the town. Hidden behind the curtain, Minka trembled in fear as she looked on through the window in disbelief.

The war arrived in a yellow truck on which was written, in large letters, "Progres"[1]. The truck parked in front of a shop. Armed people jumped out, smashed the shop windows, and started shooting into the air. This is how the war began downtown. Actually, a beginning of the war that would last for several years was unravelling in front of her eyes, which deep within she rejected and negated. Every night she would be awakened up by an explosion, for months on end. In the morning she would learn about a blown up shop, or a blown up car, but even then she didn't believe that war would actually come to Bosnia. Why? she wondered. Despite the wild inflation and economic crisis, they were all, more or less, still living quite well. In the company of like-minded people, she didn't notice the nationalism brewing under the surface around her, and she didn't believe that religious or national differences could actually bring a country to madness and war. Her arguments weren't untenable.

"One in four marriages in Bosnia is a mixed marriage[2]," she philosophised while drinking her coffee.

"How could they divide a country and people who love the country and each other so much? People, this is impossible! These leaders, these politicians, they are all assholes!" she exclaimed, opening up to her neighbours.

"There is no way! There will never be a war here! Our army will protect us, our Yugoslav People's Army. **(See Endnote I)**

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1 "Progres" was a city cleaning company, so the irony of the "cleaning" is striking!

2 Mixed marriage in which members of different religions or ethnic groups are married.

In April, she watched from her window a long line of tanks creeping towards Posavina. At night, when everything was still, she heard the echos of artillery from the direction of Bosanski Brod and Derventa.

"People, what's up with all of you? The war won't come to our town. This madness will stop in a day or two. I suppose you heard what Ćazim Hadžić, the commander of the barracks, said. That colonel seems like a respectable man to me. He said that the Yugoslav People's Army would defend the town at full force, from whoever tries to attack us!" **(See Endnote II)**

The neighbours in their concern just nodded heads. They liked hearing what they wanted to hear. They didn't even gossip about the people who packed their bags and fled. Everyone has a head on their shoulders and thinks theirs is the smartest.

The neighbour Blago was also woken by the shooting under their window. He was alone in his apartment. He had sent his wife and children off to the relatives in Germany, just in case, but he didn't want to go so as not to lose his job! He thought that it wouldn't come to war. The politicians aren't that crazy, they'll make some kind of deal. Why should people die for no reason?

Now he was looking into the darkness, at the silhouettes moving in the streets, their arms clinking, and shooting randomly in the direction of the old town. As soon as daylight came, a police car with loudspeakers on the top started cruising through the town. A long time ago, circus people would do the same to announce the arrival of the circus. Now, this was more than a circus game; it was unreal, someone was unravelling an impossible reel, an imaginative movie before their eyes. The car would stop in front of every building so that the inhabitants could hear them better. They requested the civilians hand over their weapons.

He searched for his radio. On the local radio station, Major Milovan Stanković, introduced as the "commander of the defence of the town", had just announced the "liberation of Doboj".

"This morning, my units took all the positions in the town. I'm issuing you an order and an ultimatum! By 4 pm people in the old town (Čaršija) must hand over their weapons! Otherwise, we will take military action."

Blago couldn't see from his window, let alone feel, the fear and desperation of his fellow town folk living in the old town. What damned weapons? People, women, children, were all trying to escape by all means. It was the saddest Sunday in the long history of Doboj. That morning, almost half of the

population of Doboj were driven out of their homes. Trails of people, made up of some 15,000 refugees, fled through Miljkovac, over Plane and Makljenovac towards Matuzići and Tešanj. At 4 pm, the desolate old town awaited the blasts of artillery coming from the direction of Lipac and Svjetliča. He watched as the explosions blasted roofs and houses of innocent people were engulfed by flames. A shell hit the minaret of the old mosque near the Fortress. The mosque didn't collapse, it remained upright. When the artillery fire ceased, the warmongers set dynamite. He watched from his window as the mosque wobbled, broke and fell, and a moment later the sound of the explosion followed, as if to confirm what the eyes had just witnessed.

Not long after, at the top of the mediaeval fortress, a Serb flag was raised on the flagpole.**(See Endnote III)**

"The Crisis Headquarters is ordering civilians not to go out onto the streets!" The speaker on the Radio Doboj warned. "The Crisis Headquarters is ordering the tenants' councils to lock all doors and to set up a watch at the entrance to all buildings! The Crisis Headquarters orders all citizens to seek shelter in their basements during war operations!"

Blago took a bottle of cognac from the display cabinet and went down into the basement.

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Blago took a bottle of cognac from the display cabinet and went down into the basement.

"People, don't be afraid! This will be over soon. Let's all have a glass!"

The bottle was passed around. Minka drank in gulps, as if it were water. The explosions stopped, the children calmed down and fell asleep on improvised beds. The adults couldn't sleep, and they spoke quietly so as not to wake them.

"Blago is right. He's a sensible man, our neighbour! This will pass in a day or two!"

Minka stumbled as she headed from the basement to the exit. Two or three people followed to hold her up.

"Open the door!" she yelled at the entrance. "We'll suffocate in here!"

As if she were wrestling her own self, she dug her nails into her chest and in one jerk, with both hands, she ripped apart the shirt she was wearing. The white breasts shook in their new freedom. She yelled as loudly as she could into the darkness:

"You cowards! Attack if you aren't afraid! I'm not afraid!"

Blago took off his own jacket and covered her nudity.

"Be quiet, Minka, I beg you! These fools will kill us all, us who are Serbs and you who are Muslim, all together!"

She sat on the cold staircase and started to cry loudly, bitterly, inconsolable tears.

(I) The Yugoslav People's Army betrayed itself. The dissolution of one of the biggest and best equipped armies in Europe began when brotherhood and unity, which is what its founder and leading commander fought for, was derailed and the army stopped belonging to all the peoples of Yugoslavia. This process began with the death of Josip Broz "Tito", on the 4th of May 1980, and ended with the beginning of the bloody wars in Slovenia and Croatia in 1991, and in Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1992. The crumbling had actually begun much earlier with the moral stratification and separation within the army. General Hasan Efendić (in the mid-nineteen-eighties he was Chief of the Regional Headquarters of the Territorial Defence Force of Doboj) stated that due to the "clawing" for higher ranks, sycophantic and opportunistic behaviours became more important than being capable of fulfilling the official requirements. Even though the Constitution of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia guaranteed proportionate representation of ethnic groups in commanding ranks, the real picture of the mid-eighties didn't adhere adequately to the national demographics of the country. The army recruitment was made up of 33.5% Serbs and Montenegrins, while the Serbs and Montenegrins in leadership positions, including those with epaulettes of the highest rank, made up over 66% percent of the total positions. This disproportionate representation of all other peoples in the commanding echelon was even more marked in the Counter-Intelligence Service of the Yugoslav People's Army, which according to Raif Dizdarević, the ex-president of the Presidency of Yugoslavia, was the root cause of serious deformity within the Army, which opened the doors to nationalism seeping into the army ranks:

"I believe that the Counter-Intelligence Service of the Yugoslav People's Army was among the first parts of the military elite where Greater-Serbian nationalism strove to penetrate into civilian structures and manipulate them for their own goals. I believe the Counter Intelligence played a large role in the betrayal which the leaders of the Yugoslav People's Army performed."

After the 14th Emergency Congress and subsequent dissolution of the Communist party, the Yugoslav People's Army was left without ideological support and lent itself to the political agenda of Slobodan Milošević. With the introduction of a multi-party system, and the victories of nationalist parties that followed, a greater aspiration for hegemony was desired by the majority Serb population, and a greater aspiration for autonomy was desired by the others, the Slovenes, Croats, Bosnians, and Macedonians. This is how "Greater-Serbia" ideologies flourished in one direction, and separatist ideologies flourished in the other, while the federative or confederative organisa-

tion of the country advocated by the reformist ideology of Ante Marković, the last president of the Federal Government of Yugoslavia, didn't garner plebiscitary military or republican votes. In the new political space, the Yugoslav People's Army lost its compass. The war in Slovenia at the end of June 1991 posed a crucial question to the Headquarters: would the Yugoslav People's Army defend the constitutional order of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, and the country as a whole, or will it align itself with the Greater-Serb hegemonic and political platform of Slobodan Milošević? After its defeat in the ten-day war in Slovenia, led without a clear goal or strategy, it became clear that the Yugoslav People's Army had entirely aligned itself with the nationalism which had integrated its military doctrine into the operation known by the code name RAM.

(On Wikipedia: RAM was a military plan developed by senior Serbian officers of the Yugoslav People's Army and experts from the Department of Psychological Operations of the Army, throughout 1990 and finalised in Belgrade, during a military-strategic meeting in August 1991. The goal was the organisation of Serbs outside of Serbia, the consolidation of control of the Serb Democratic Party, and the preparation of weapons and ammunition in the endeavour to create a country in which "all Serbs within their given territories could live together in the same country". A special group of secret officers and military officers was assigned the task of implementing the plan).

This hidden intention became more and more obvious with the break-out of war in Croatia, especially after the heartless bombing of Vukovar and Dubrovnik, which would in turn create distrust in the army, and would lead to the expulsion of members of other nationalities and officers of a "Yugoslav" profile. Thus the process of transforming the Yugoslav People's Army into a single national army was, according to the standard of Serb hegemony, complete.

The army was founded on the 22nd of December 1941, initially named National Liberation Army of Yugoslavia, to defend the country from fascism, the German occupiers, and local quislings. From its roots in the Partisan spirit of unity to the last brother-killing war, the army, after a full 50 years, descended into self-betrayal.

Afraid of international retaliation for the aggressions on the newly independent nations, the Military Headquarters was forced to dress up with a new name and with new insignia. The five pointed red star had already been changed to nationalist symbols.

The Yugoslav National Army officially ceased to exist on the 20th of May 1992. In Serbia and Montenegro, which continued to call themselves The

Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, the army was renamed the Army of Yugoslavia; in Croatia, from the remaining weaponry and units, it was called The Serb Army of Krajina; in Bosnia and Herzegovina it was called the Army of Republika Srpska. During the entirety of the war these newly formed armies remained connected with their "home" army for supplies, weapons, intelligence and technical support.

(II) Lieutenant Colonel Ćazim Hadžić, commander of the garrison of the Yugoslav People's Army in Doboj, was removed from his post at dawn on the 3rd of May 1992 by the military police, commanded by major Milovan Stanković. "He was in his pyjamas and was shaking like a leaf," stated a policeman who, along with two others, disarmed him, escorted him from his apartment, and drove him in a military vehicle to a jail in Banja Luka. A few days later he was released on "paid leave" which he spent in his home village near the town Ključ. Lieutenant Colonel Hadžić was then transferred officially to Belgrade. He wasn't delegated to lead a unit as would be appropriate for his rank; he was pushed into simple administrative jobs of small importance. His active military service ended, on his request, on the 30th of April 1993. Hadžić returned to Bosnia in October 1994 where he was arrested. The judicial council of the District Military Court in Sarajevo found him guilty, on the 7/4/1995, for committing the crime of working in the service of the enemy's army, and sentenced him to two years and six months in prison. Major Milovan Stanković, who had "succeeded" lieutenant colonel Hadžić and who had commanded the operation of "liberating" Doboj, hasn't been persecuted or convicted.

(III) The war in Doboj began on the night between the 2nd and 3rd of May 1992, which is now marked by the commemorative plaque in Lipac erected in 2010. Under the symbol of the cross, in large letters is written (in Cyrillic): "BY THE DECISION OF THE CRISIS HEADQUARTERS OF THE MUNICPALITY OF DOBOJ ON THE 2ND OF MAY 1992, FROM THIS SPOT THE SERBS' SONS WENT INTO ACTION TO DEFEND DOBOJ, CHOOSING TO GIVE THEIR LIVES FOR FREEDOM OF THE SERBS". The commemorative plaque commemorates the date of the start of the war, and it features some minor grammatical mistakes, and is 18 years belated, having been erected on the 2nd of May in 2010. Under the commemorative text it is written: "THE ASSOCIATION OF CITIZEN DEFENDERS OF DOBOJ 02.05.1992"

The beginning of the war in Doboj, and events from 1992 have been mentioned many times at The Hague Tribunals, and they are the subject of court

cases which are ongoing in the High Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Milan Ninković, Borislav Paravac, Andrija Bjelošević and Milan Savić are on the dock. "The indictment states that during the period from the 3rd of May at the latest to the end of 1993, as part of widespread and systematic attacks directed at the civilian Bosniak and Croat populations in the area of Doboj and Teslić municipalities, Milan Ninković, member of the Crisis Headquarters of the Serb Municipality of Doboj, Borislav Paravac, president of the Crisis Headquarters of the Serb Municipality of Doboj, Andrija Bjelošević, head of the Central Agency for Security in Doboj Police Station of Republic of Srpska and simultaneously as a member of the Crisis Headquarters of the Serb Municipality of Doboj, were participants in a collective criminal enterprise for the purposes of forced deportation of Bosniak and Croat populations based on their national and religious identities; and Milan Savić, deputy of the head of the Central Agency for Security in Doboj, knowing about the aggression and that their actions were part of the aggression with discriminatory intent, have executed forced deportation of the civilian Bosniak and Croat populations accompanied by murder, imprisonment, and other serious acts of deprivation of physical freedoms and other inhuman acts committed with the intention of inflicting great suffering or serious physical or psychological injuries. The indictiment accuses the accused Milan Ninković, Borislav Paravac, Andrija Bjelošević and Milan Savić of having committed the criminal act of crimes against humanity."

Before the Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina, in the role of a witness a statement was issued by Obren Petrović, the then-head of the Centre for Public Safety and Security in Doboj. His testimony sheds more light on the events from ninety-two:

PROSECUTION: What, to your knowledge, was done regarding the preparation and take-over of power in the police and civilian structures in the region of Doboj in the period around May 1992?

PETROVIĆ: Around mid-April 1992, on the territory of the mountain Ozren, helicopters arrived from Serbia with members of the Special Forces "Red Berets". Their role at the time was to recruit and train other volunteers and members from the army and the police. At the head of the Red Berets was Radojica Božović, and I remember some others, but just by their nicknames. They were Riki, who was called "Cleft palate", and some guy called "Dimić", a Macedonian who died later. In the period from the arrival of the Red Berets and up until the beginning of May 1992, around 300 people had gone through training, and among them were young men from other regions, like, say, Vozuća.

PROSECUTION: Where were the trained members of the army and police sent to?

PETROVIĆ: It is known that one such unit existed in the Centre for Public Security and Safety (CBS) Doboj led by Slobodan Karagić, nicknamed Karaga. Radojica Božović, as the commander of the Red Berets, came on more than one occasion to the official rooms of the CBS Doboj and spoke to Andrija Bjelošević, who was the head of the Central Agency for Security, and also spoke with his closest associates Milan Savić and Dušan Živković, who was the head of the Agency for National Security. These meetings were attended by Borislav Paravac and Milan Ninković, members of the Crisis Headquarters of the municipality of Doboj; Milan Ninković came occasionally, but decisions he made in his capacity of the president of the Serb Democratic Party of the town of Doboj and member of parliament were actively implemented on the terrain. I never attended those meetings.

PROSECUTION: What do you know about the actual preparation and taking over of all the positions in the police, and later in the municipality, and in other places?

PETROVIĆ: Before the local authority was taken over by the Serb Democratic Party and the Crisis Headquarters of the municipality of Doboj, there existed some kind of an agreement between the holders of key functions from among the members of Serb nationality. It is possible that meetings were held in the village of Lipac, in the rooms of the primary school there. I think that certain preparations for these activities were carried out during these meetings. I didn't attend any, but as a representative of the police force, Bjelošević would always go there. The taking over of the governing body was done on the 3rd of May 1992, when it was a non-working day. I noticed that in Lipac there was a high concentration of weapons, the military, various specialist units from other regions, including the "White Eagles" from Brod. It seemed to me that this whole army would execute an attack on Doboj. Members of the Red Berets first entered the police station, which was located at the train station, which was closest to Lipac. They asked every member of the police force for their name and if they were a Serb, they would remain in their usual position, and the others were instantly beaten and taken to jail. This would happen in the late hours of the night. It happened on Saturday going on Sunday, I think it began at midnight, and was completed in the whole town by two a.m. When in the morning I came to the office, I found a number of Serb nationals, while the Croats and Bosniaks were missing. I discovered that they had been arrested based on previously prepared lists,

which I saw eventually on an occasion when Milan Savić showed it to me. Employees of the Centre for National Security led by Dušan Živković and members of Special units led by major Stanković, to whom Milan Savić and Mirko Stojčinović were close, were involved in the creation of these lists. Members of groups led by Predrag Kujundžić, nicknamed Predo, Slobodan Karagić Karaga, Nikola Jorgić Jorga, participated in the arrests as they knew the town's folk very well and would immediately take all those arrested to the District jail.

PROSECUTION: What happened to the property of the arrested persons?

PETROVIĆ: After the houses, apartments, and other properties owned by Croats and Bosniaks were deserted, the groups which did the arresting would ransack the houses and take valuables for themselves. One group of military policemen who were led by commander Martić, I don't know his name, found a large quantity of gold and silver jewellery in the house of Mustafa Omić. Later on, another group of Red Berets found themselves there, among them Slobodan Dević and Branko Jovanović. I know that on that day Dević and the others brought to the official rooms of the Police Station Doboj a lot of gold, more than ten kilograms, which was then put in a safe. This was all recorded by Anica Jondić who now works in Banja Luka in the Police Union. Everything relating to these events was known to Mladen Vulić as well. As I was told by my colleagues Mladen Vulić and Mirko Stojčinović (who was then the chief of the Department of Public Security) at some point during 1993. Andrija Bjelošević transferred the gold to some place in Bijeljina in order to hand it over to the police headquarters; however, every trace of that gold is lost.

PROSECUTION: What is known to you in relation to the attacks on the Bosniak and Croat civilian population?

PETROVIĆ: The first one of that kind came from the village Grapska. The order was given by Major Stanković. Members of the local community in Grapska requested a meeting with the Serb authorities aiming to reach a deal about how to behave. However, this meeting didn't happen. Excessive force and weapons were used. A small number of people managed to escape, but the others, more than a hundred, immediately surrendered. They were taken to army hangars in the neighbourhood of Bare. After this there was an attack on some parts of the town, first on the old town, then Čaire, Orašje, Miljkovac, Prisade and Makljenovac. When members of the Army of Bosnia and Herzegovina, from the direction of Tešanj and Usora, went in for the

attack towards Doboj on the 12th of July 1992, a decision was made instantly at that moment to take one group of civilians out, and maybe all of them, from Perčo's disco, only to deploy them as a human shield on the territory above the neighbourhood of Vila, in order to stop this attack. I heard that around 30 civilians who were in the human shield were killed then. It was said that Milutin Blašković, a member of the police, ordered to take the civilians out in order to be used as a human shield. I don't know who gave him that order, but I'm sure that the ultimate commanders were members of the Red Berets.

PROSECUTION: Was there physical abuse of prisoners?

PETROVIĆ: The assaulting and starving of civilian prisoners who were here happened often. I know this because the families of the captured civilians would contact me as the head of the Police Station Doboj. With the goal of trying to do anything for them, I used to tell Mladen Vulić that, according to the lists of families who contacted me, he should find out where their family members were detained, and to try to bring them to the police station. I tried to help them somehow. I know that Mladen Vulić went from jail to jail with these pieces of paper and found imprisoned civilians. I was told in what condition they lived in, that the army and guards were beating them, that they didn't have enough food, or water. In these situations, I made decisions to let these people go back to their homes.

PROSECUTION: What was the role of Milan Savić compared to Andrija Bjelošević and other key individuals in leadership positions within the CSB Doboj?

PETROVIĆ: Savić previously worked as a police officer-technician in CSB Doboj. I heard more serious rumours about him when both he and Dobrivoje Ćulibrk were arrested in Jelah right before the war. They were found with a certain amount of explosives, which were confiscated on that occasion. They spent some time in jail then, but with the intervention of Bjelošević they managed to obtain their release from the chief of police of Tešanj, Šemsudin Mehmedović. I know that soon Milan Savić was soon appointed assistant head of CSB Doboj, but as there had be no appointed deputy to the head Andrija Bjelošević, he also performed the function of the deputy head. Savić was a close associate of Bjelošević and he was the person through whom all the important tasks of the time were carried out.

PROSECUTION: Who was the person held responsible for what happened in the District jail of Doboj in that period?

PETROVIĆ: In the first period it was Mirko Slavuljica, the warden of the District Jail of Doboj who stayed in that position until around June 1992, when he was transferred to the Department for Security of the Army of Republic of Srpska, and Milan Vidić was appointed in his position.

PROSECUTION: Can you remember the names of the guards in the District Jail of Doboj in that period?

PETROVIĆ: As far as I can remember now, there were two brothers Ninković, Miroslav Petričević, Đorđo Damjanović, Marković, Kujundžić, who I know by name. I can't remember the others now.

PROSECUTION: Were you made aware of the fact that prisoners were being taken away from the jail?

PETROVIĆ: A group of prisoners was taken out, among them our colleague Karlo Grgić. On that day, as far as I know, a group of around 12 prisoners was taken out. At that time I heard Riki went into the jail with a list that he had, and read their names one by one and asked them to come out. Outside, in front of the jail, a parked van was waiting and the group of 12 prisoners was loaded into the van and driven in an unknown direction. A certain Vuković, nicknamed Vuk, assisted Riki in taking out the prisoners. Vuković at the time was working as a member of the jail police force. He was originally from Bosanska Krajina, where he had worked somewhere as a prison guard.

Prison

"This is Serbia!" they roared outside.

"Fools," his neighbour whispered into his ears. "This isn't Serbia; this is a jail."

He would have laughed, but his beaten up face couldn't stretch into a smile, and he didn't really feel like laughing anyway – the yelling wasn't promising anything good. Two weeks ago, the Red Berets had taken them both from their apartments downtown, without a warrant or a reason. They had asked for their ID cards at the door and when they read their names, they ordered them to go out at the front of the building. They were shoved into a van on which was written "Mesopromet – Doboj"[3]. There were no seats in the back, and already four others from the building next door were sitting on the scratched metal floor, soon to be joined by two more. They didn't travel far. The building of the police station was in the town centre, and right next to it the municipal jail. They were driven in between those two buildings, and they could hear rabble and music coming from the yard encircled by a tall cement wall. They started beating them as soon as they stepped out of the van.

"Balijas! You want your own country? Now you'll get it!"

In the basement hall they could hear the clanking of weapons, and a sizeable group of armed men in various uniforms filled out the space with swearing and yelling. Some wore red berets, others wore camouflage caps, while others just wore a black headband over their foreheads. He wondered if it was possible to feel anything but fear at that moment, let alone wonder. Their faces were all colourful and painted in a dark colour. He thought that in one of the shorter ones he recognised professor Žika from the High School.

"A welcome for our newly arrived guests!" yelled one of the leaders.

"Right away," the painted ones began to laugh, forming lines from the front doors to the hallway which led to the offices of the investigation officers.

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3 Mesopromet – company for the processing and trade of meat products

Every one of them in the group of twenty hit them at full force at least once while they passed in between them. He thought that his professor wouldn't have kicked him that aggressively in the ribcage like this person did; every time they saw each other on the street they would always exchange pleasant greetings and conversation. Maybe it wasn't actually him?

They were divided into the offices in the basement. Two unknown soldiers, speaking Serbian, were waiting for him. This was easier to bear; he didn't want to be harassed by people he knew from the streets, people he would see all the time. Their blows would be heavier and more painful, he thought. These two unknown men beat him with police batons. He tried to protect his head with his hands. There was no escaping or hiding from the most unbearable hits.

"What is this today? We have to work overtime!"

It appeared that they were genuinely tired from "working overtime", and after ten minutes of beating and swearing they took him to jail.

The building was constructed after the old war according to Russian models, during the period of good Komintern relations. It was a rectangular building on two floors. The cells were on the ground floor, eight rooms with twelve beds for the inmates, and the top floor held the department for the investigators, the employees, and the guards. For the past 45 years, the jail had never been full, and even though the region was large, under Tito's police force there were fewer thieves than the jail could accommodate. There had always been empty beds! This time, in May 1992, all the cells were packed with more prisoners than it had been intended for. Not a single one of them had been detained with a legal warrant and all of them knew that they were there only because they were of the wrong nationality and a different religion. Two inmates would share a bed, but even that wasn't a solution because new people were constantly being brought in. The newcomers were given spongey mattresses, dirty and bloody from the wounds of the others who had slept on them previously. He knew most of the people in the prison cell from the town. Beating and uncertainty contorted their pale faces. Each one of them carried his own concerns, which like his own, grew with fear every new day. At first, hope flickered. "They'll release me quickly! This is a mistake! I haven't done anything wrong to anyone! I don't have any enemies in this town, only friends! One of them will find out where I am, and they'll fight for my release!" And with every following day, every time the door opened, he

expected to his hear his name called. "I haven't done anything wrong to anyone! They'll release me!"

They called his name on the third day. He knew the inspector from earlier, and he didn't beat him but in his cold tone of voice there was no help. He interrogated him: if he'd been a member of any party, did he vote in the referendum, did he vote for an independent Bosnia and Herzegovina?

"Will you let me go?" he asked the investigator.

"That's not up to me," the inspector replied.

He was taken back to his cell. They took other inmates out, and some would return bruised and bloody. One of them couldn't walk; he was carried in by the prison guards and left in the middle of the room. When he came to, he said that three men had kicked him and beat him with a thick electric cable, which left visible bruising all over his body. During the day there was some semblance of order: waking up, breakfast, lunch, dinner, rest, and in between were interrogations, obligations to work, and new arrivals. A man can't enjoy a single day of time spent in jail, but every daytime was better than the evenings. Night didn't bring peaceful sleep in this jail just uncertainty, and worse. As soon as darkness came one could hear yelling and drunken singing. The 350 people in the jail would anticipate in fear in which cell the guards would let the Red Berets, or other unknown, drugged-up soldiers in masks or camouflage uniforms, or bearded ones who reeked of alcohol and carried cartridge belts crossed over their chests and the cockade on their furcaps. They would take the inmates out. The beatings would start in the hallway. One could hear cries and muffled beating, or they would be taken to the interrogation rooms from which they would return half dead. These butchers were only known by their nicknames; they would whisper their names to one another, and share their fears of falling into the hands of Jorga, Njegoš, Tuzlak, Vuk, Staniša...

Once, the Red Berets called for a group of six men from Grapska, and then six more. They never saw them again. They never came back.

His fear was still firmly clinging on to whimsical hope.

"Someone will notify my friends that I've been taken away. They'll fight for my release. We grew up together, played together as children, went to school together. They'll release me from this prison as soon as they find out that I'm innocent."

On the fourteenth day in jail, as with every other night, his children visited him in his dreams while he was half asleep. He felt as if he hadn't seen them for a year, when in fact they had said goodbye at the bus station only three weeks ago. The news didn't bode anything good: no one was coming in, and everyone was leaving! Still, he kept this blind and unreliable hope alive – he didn't believe that war would actually come to his hometown. The politicians would sort something out soon. It's impossible to divide Bosnia! Who is stupid enough to fight in a war?

A friend had called him from Belgrade.

"Come, all of you, straight away!" he had told him. "I have a house in Žarkovo. For you, your wife and your children we will find room! Leave brotherhood and fraternity and "proud Bosnia". Your family is the most important thing. Don't hesitate, my Bosnian friend! Fucking hell, you stubborn man, come right now!"

This is what his friend had said, a friend he had met a long time ago during their obligatory military service, with whom he had continued his friendship during holidays and mutual visits.

"This madness will pass," he had thought. "Where could I go now, I'll lose my job! How will we live if I get fired? I have to stay here, I'll send my wife and kids to Belgrade." He managed to buy three tickets, through a special link with someone, for the last bus out.

"Please, take care of yourself," his wife had said at the bus platform. Everyone around them was saying their goodbyes, it was time to get on the bus, and all the children were restless. His six-year-old daughter was sobbing. She hugged him tightly and rested her face on his. Tears stuck locks of her curly blonde hair down.

"Daddy, you won't come!"

"I will, definitely! Just go with your brother and mother. I will come in about ten days!"

"Will you really?"

"I will, I promise. You know your daddy has never lied to you. Please, don't cry!"

"I won't anymore. I love you, daddy!"

The little hands tightly held his neck.

"Hurry up, people, we're already late!" the bus driver begged everyone.

His wife took her daughter in her arms. The son was two years older and he pursed his lips, but he didn't cry.

"Be good! Take care of your mother and sister!" He whispered as if he were telling him the greatest secret while he hugged him.

"I love you, son!"

"I love you too, dad!"

With a heavy sigh he watched the pneumatic door of the bus close behind the small, weak back, which would stay in his mind's eye forever. He waited for the boy to sit next to the window, and he leant his hand on the glass. The little hand melted into his one from the other side. He couldn't hold back his tears...

In the prison yard he could hear a thundering rendition of "This is Serbia!"

"Don't cry," whispered his neighbour in the cell. "This will pass too."

"I'm not crying. I was just thinking of my kids."

The chanting was getting louder and more riotous. "Serbia! Serbia!"

Then the yard was quiet. They had come inside. We could hear how they were taking people out of the cell next door.

One minute later the door opened.

The guard called his name and the order:

"Get out!"

In the cells of the old municipal jail called "Spreča" in Doboj, in May and June 1992, there were around 350 inmates (including ten women) who were arrested without a warrant or a reason, with only one unwritten and unsaid charge: they were of a different religion and nationality. Up until March 1993, a total of 750 inmates had gone through this jail. Their interrogations began - and ended - with a beating, after which they were taken back to jail with a battering on the way, which, according to testimonies by witnesses, were led by the guards: Dušan Vuković, Staniša Miljanović, Branislav Ninković, Vojin Lukić, Dragoljub Radulović. Days in jail were difficult and the nights even more so! At night the Martić's paramilitary groups, White Eagles, uniformed evil-doers with red berets, cockades and black headbands would arrive. The guards would open the doors, and the aforementioned would undisturbedly take innocent people out to be tortured. Their fury and pathological hatred would be taken out on the helpless prisoners. They would beat them with wooden poles, legs of chairs, electric cables, baseball bats, rifle stocks.

Jozo Matanović, Stipo Čičak, and Marko Kikić died in jail from their injuries. Another death as a result of injuries from beatings in the concentration camp of the Agricultural Estate of "Bosnakoop" in Rudanka, was of the famous and respected Doboj citizen, Dr. Ilija Tipura. The ex-mayor of the municipality and Doctor of Economics, Ilija Tipura went into a coma after sustaining serious head injuries and was transferred from the hospital in Doboj to Banja Luka. He died on the 20th of September 1992 after a late and unsuccessful operation, with the diagnosis of a haematoma in his right lobe. This crime, like many others, was never legally prosecuted.

Zulfo Ćirić, the manager of a large transport business company, was arrested and then released from jail (with the assistance and intervention of his best man, Kuzman), but he didn't live long as a free man. He was taken from his apartment and killed in a cowardly way in Stanovi. It is assumed that those who did it were his employees from the previous company "Bosnaprevoz" where he had been the director. The names of two men from Rudanka have been mentioned.

The priest from Dragalovci, Marko Šalić, survived the jail and a concentration camp, but he died one year later as a result of his beatings and torture.

They took people out into the night who never again returned. This is how Karlo Grgić, a retired commander of the police station in Doboj disappeared; also, Drago Martinović, a railway worker and singer of folk songs; Ismet Grahić, an employee of the Railway Transportation Company, and a corres-

pondent for the newspaper "The Railway News". 12 prisoners were taken out of the Doboj jail on the 24th of May, 1992, and every trace of them is lost. Among them were nine locals of Grapska: Esad (son of Ahmet) Bešić, Šerif (son of Mehmed) Bešić, Kasim (son of Mujo) Bešić, Ramiz (son of Muradif) Bešić, Nedžad Bešić, Šemsudin (son of Redžo) Hamidović, Esed (son of Atif) Hidić, Muhamed (son of Hasan) Ibrahimović, Safet (son of Hasib) Nukičić, and Nijaz Zečević from Bukovačke Čivčije, Avdo Kurtović from Miričina, and Mustafa Osmanbegović from Ševarlije. Rumour has it that they were shot somewhere on Ozren, and their bodies to this day haven't been found. The silent wall of eyewitnesses protects the executors and the shame of collective guilt for the murder of innocent people. The mass grave that is suspected to exist still hasn't been discovered.

The horrors in the Doboj jail persisted until the International Red Cross Organisation arrived, after a tip off of the dark events in Doboj, and demanded to see the condition of the inmates and make a record of them. After their arrival, only the food got slightly better, but the situation remained the same. Actually, after telling the representatives of the Red Cross the truth about the tortures, at the end of January 1993, the inmate Marko Kikić from Odžak was violently beaten and couldn't walk, so had to be taken to his cell. An hour later his mouth started bleeding and he died in the arms of his fellow inmates. A "post-mortem analysis" in the hospital in Doboj showed that he had died of a heart attack!

After the war, with a twenty-two-year delay since the incriminating events, only two criminal prosecutions of the lower scale began. In the first case, the prison guard Branislav Ninković was sentenced to two years in jail. However, the High Court of Republika Srpska nulled this sentence and demanded the Regional Court of Doboj to do a retrial, where he was sentenced to less time, only 15 months in jail.

Some of the inmates who had been beaten so severely and had their ribs broken, or suffered heavy injuries or wounds testified as witnesses at this hearing. Witnesses who testified about Doboj's great shame were: Mirza Lišinović, Šaban Ibraković, Mustafa Nukičić, Sejfudin Suljić, Ešef Hidić, Fadil Ahmić, Hasan Krdžalić, Sakib Hurtić, Hasib Muratović, Mustafa Kovačević, and two testimonies of witnesses/inmates written at an earlier date were read out before the court. Those were testimonies of: Stjepan Jeleč, Nahid Mrkaljević, and Hasib Subašić.

The guards also testified. Đorđo Damjanović had just started working as a prison guard. While speaking in court, he said that the jail walls were bloody,

the cells overcrowded, and the life conditions were desperate: "We avoided discussing what happened in the jail. As a human being I felt worthless. I didn't trust my co-workers. I couldn't help the prisoners! The guards couldn't stand against the Red Berets, military police, or other uniformed and armed persons who came to the jail and beat the prisoners."

The poor people were helpless, could expect their end every day, and no one would even know what had happened! The warden at the time was Mirko Slavuljica, and he was replaced by Miroslav Vidić.

At the beginning of 2016 the Public Prosecutor's Office for War Crimes of the Republic of Serbia filed an indictment before the High Court in Belgrade against Dušan Vuković, nicknamed Vuk, born in Golubić, municipality of Knin, for assaulting the inmates in the jail "Spreča" (in Doboj). Vuković had been a prison guard in Šibenik and in Zagreb and had arrived to Doboj at the start of the war, and later moved to Belgrade. After the testimonies of the witnesses, ex-inmates, just before the pronouncement of his sentence the process unexpectedly ended because the accused – died.

These two minor legal cases show the real face of the law and of truth: the murders and crimes that were committed in the jail in Doboj, and also in military and labour concentration camps, by the Red Berets, Martić's paramilitary units, and others from other paramilitary units, will by the looks of things remain unpunished, even though the names of those guilty are known and even kept hidden in police records. So many years after the crimes were committed, the main perpetrators, namely the representatives of government and politics, those who prepared Doboj for war and initiated illegal arrests, as well as the direct perpetrators of torture and murder, have escaped the hand of justice. They are protected by the silence of the co-criminals and the fear of revenge.

The families and friends of those who are still missing haven't given up hope of finding the bodies of the victims hoping to give them a dignified burial.

Prisade[4]

Grandma Kata stepped onto the front porch, awaiting the postman.

"Jozo, my son[5]! Will there be anything of our pension payment?"

"Of course, grandma, it's practically here! They've sent bags of money, they're unloading them in Doboj Novi!" Jozo laughs.

Even when his post bag is empty and without pension payments or letters he brings joy to Prisade. That is his temperament, jubilant and joyous, with a smile and a kind word ready for everyone. The pension payments are three months late. Even if they arrive they'll be eaten up by inflation, they won't pay for a few decagrams of coffee or a packet of cigarettes.

"Who will survive these expenses? If it weren't for our children we'd all die of hunger!" grandma Kata complained.

"You're lucky you have such honourable kids! What do you want your pension for when it's not worth anything? I have to deliver it and walk around the village for nothing" the postman continues in his jovial tone.

"And where is grandpa Tunjo? I haven't seen him lately."

"Eh, grandpa is being his usual self. Sitting by the stove!"

"The stove! Look at this sun, it's time to start planting corn!" laughs Jozo.

He knows that grandma Kata is 79 years old and grandpa Tunjo is 80, and that they are well past the age for working hard in the fields. But as the postman, he knows he must have a chat about something. A postman with an empty bag must still greet the locals and ask them about their health.

April brought green to the landscape. From Prisade there is a clear view of Doboj. The sky is radiant and blue, and it seems like everything that can be seen from the hills of Prisade is within the grasp of one's hand. That divine

4 A village in the Doboj region

5 The expression "sine," meaning "my son," is a term of endearment expressed by elders to the younger generations, regardless of familial ties or even gender.

beauty is marred only by the sight of planes, which are flying unusually low, growing deafeningly louder and louder, and instilling fear.

"Devil take them, flying all around the place!" grandma exclaims as she waves goodbye to the postman, leaving him on his way through the village.

Postman Jozo built his house on Putnik Hill, near the cemetery in Prisade. With his wife Kaja he has three children, a son and a daughter just starting school, and a baby son – still in the cradle. Nearby is the shooting base and an army building. The sounds of occasional gunshots haven't been unusual to them, however what they have been hearing of late in the evenings and at night has been a growing source of terror.

About a month ago, the thunder of artillery strikes coming from Bosanski Brod was barely audible, but then it started getting louder and louder. At the same time postman Jozo's bag was starting to become more and more empty. The way home was also becoming more treacherous as it was getting obstructed by barricades and army vehicles. Then, on the radio, they heard that Doboj had been "liberated".

They came for him on the fourth of May and took him to prison.

The next day grandma Kata and grandpa Anto listened to the broadcast on their small radio.

"If Prisade doesn't surrender its weapons by 12 pm tomorrow I will launch an army intervention," a deep and resonant voice warned.

The village became silent overnight. Everyone left by the way of Miljkovac, Plane and Zubak, through Makljenovac and further towards Ularice, Alibegovci, and Sivša.

"We survived the war with the Germans" thought grandpa Anto to himself, "we'll survive this one too. We haven't wronged anyone; we don't need to run".

Precisely at noon the grenades started raining down. They hid in the basement while the sky was roaring and the earth was shaking from the explosions and cannon ball strikes. In the afternoon, a stillness overrided. They turned themselves into an ear, listening to the eerie silence. Then they heard thudding footsteps, yelling, and a general commotion. Shortly after they barged in pointing their guns.

"Out! Get the fuck out!" yelled a soldier.

"Fucking ustaše[6]! Weapons, where are your weapons!" he hissed.

"God help you, dear child! What weapons? Can't you see we can barely walk?" grandma Kata calmly responded.

They took them out the front of the house and shot them at point blank range.

6 Ustaše were members of the military formations of the fascist Croatian government in the Second World War and since the population in this village is of Croatian ethnic background, this term is used as an offensive denominator of their ethnicity implying that the fascist spirit from the past is still pervading

Kata and Anto Petrović, nicknamed Tunjo, along with 16 other civilians, were murdered on the 6th of May in the village Prisade by Serbian army forces combined with paramilitary fighters. The first artillery attack by VBR[7] was on Sunday, the 3rd of May 1992, in the afternoon, from the direction of Kladari. The occupation of Prisade was three days later, on Wednesday, the 6th of May. It began with the already successful tactic devised by Major Milovan Stanković, commander of the army operation, the army operation of the "liberation" of Doboj, with his threats on Radio Doboj, ultimatum for surrendering weapons and spiteful threats of shelling. The occupation of Prisade was achieved by an artillery attack and a simultaneous attack with armoured vehicles and foot soldiers. They entered from three directions: by the graveyard, next to Kneževića House, and from the direction of Doboj and Pločnik. At the same time they blocked the exit from Prisade towards Mala Bukovica and Rudanka, and cut off the exit over Putnik Hill towards Makljenovac.

The attack was focused on the centre of Prisade and was relatively short as there was no resistance, however the operation of "cleansing" went on into the next day. It was mostly old men and women who, having stayed at their homes, were the helpless victims: Janja Bilić, maiden name Zubak (1928), Jozo Bilić (1927), Franjo Grgić - Pranjoš (1930), Ivka Grgić (1921), Iva Grgić (1915), Luka Grgić (1911), Marko Grgić (1933), Nikola Grgić (1927), Ruža Grgić, maiden name Knežević (1942), Tadija Grgić (1940), Marijan Hrkač (1944), Mijat Knežević (1925), Petar Mandir (1915), Anto Petrović - Tunjo (1912), Kata Petrović, maiden name Barišić (1913), Anto Šimunović - Titra (1925), Hugo Vodopivec (1914) i Anto Vrkaševi (1920). Some of them were born before the first world war; they had survived many evils only to be taken by this last one.

In order to hide this unspeakable crime the bodies of six were driven off and to this day haven't been discovered.

The weapons that had been the excuse for the shelling were never, of course, found. According to the testimony of collaborators, the ordering of weapons for personal use and self-defence and for use for foot soldiers at the time was a reflection of the armament of majority Serb villages, and it was most likely that someone from the Counterintelligence Secret Service of the Yugoslav Army exaggerated the amount of weapons in the village, when in reality it was around twenty pistols and guns, which in turn served as an excuse for the planned ethnic cleansing.

7 VBR = long-range combat missiles

After the shelling and the attacks, several locals from Prisade who managed to survive remained on the outskirts of the village right up to the battle on Putnik Hill on the 12th of July 1992, only to be captured and thrown into prison where they were tortured physically and emotionally. Petar Novak (1941) was accused of transporting weapons. He was murdered by way of being hit in the head with a shovel in a concentration camp on the Usora river. One of the more affluent Prisade locals, Karlo Grgić, the officer at the Station for public safety in Doboj, was arrested and beaten to death in jail. He was transported to a hospital on the 25th of May and driven off in an unknown direction never to be seen again.

The postman, Jozo Vidović – Đoka (1959) was arrested without criminal charges and taken first to the army barracks and then to the jail "Spreča" in Doboj until the commander of the Red Berrets Riki (full name Davor Subotić) took him out of the cell along with twelve other inmates. Among them was also the imprisoned police commander Mirko Grujić. Apparently, one of the guards recognised him, and perhaps realising what was to come, insisted on him being returned to his cell. That guard saved his life. All of those who had been told they were being led to cleanse the land in Johovac, to dig graves for the dead humans and for dead livestock, never returned. They were killed after their work was done.

The remains of Postman Jozo were discovered in 2007 in a mass grave in Bosanski Brod. It is assumed that he made it there in one of the exchanges of Serb and Croat soldiers and civilians. An autopsy confirmed death by a gun wound to the head. He was only 33. He was buried in Zagreb. His house in Prisade doesn't exist anymore. It was burned to the ground.

A similar fate was common to many other residents of Prisade who had called that place their home for decades even centuries. The empty village became a target for looters who took everything they could carry, from the floor to the roof. First the livestock that was found was taken. Then, following the strategy of "Charred Earth", landmines were placed in and around all of the dwellings, and one by one the buildings were burnt and destroyed.

Evil carried on from the old war to this war, like a disease, springing from one and into another, with the unavoidable stigmas of the legacies of the ustaše and četniks. The father of Zvonko Grujić, the latter being killed in this war, was Ilija Grujić who had been killed in the Second World War. Ilija was the mayor of the Rudanka County during the NDH. He was murdered right before the end of the war, in May 1945. He was killed by his neighbours, Serbs, who had crossed over from the četnik ideology to Partisans in April of

that year, only one month before (killing him). Zvonko Grujić (1935) was put in a concentration camp on the Usora river at the beginning of July, 1992. When he was released, he wanted to return to Prisade. He slept at his neighbour Jovo S's place and in the morning of the 31st July 1992 he went on his way to the hearth of his home. Since then every trace of him has been lost. His remains were discovered in the spring of 1998 in a forest, one hundred meters away from the place where his own father had been killed in 1945. The spiral of evil keeps moving.

Of the one hundred and fifty houses that had been destroyed in Prisade about fifteen have been recovered, and about ten are inhabited. Before the war the village had about 414 residents. Today only the occasional "returning" local is to be found, ten in total! The foundation "Our Prisade" in Zagreb,with donations received from around the world, managed to fund a commemorative statue built in 2014 for the murdered and missing victims. In the middle part of the statue is a stone cross, and on the sides are two "broken" pieces with twenty-nine names, under which is written, "They lived, defended, and died as themselves on their own land". Prisade are one of the most shameful examples of uncontrollable violence and abuse of power by the army. For the last thirty years, the survivors have been looking for the dead relatives while neighbours who were witnesses and/or participants in the past crimes and in the deletion of the village off the face of the earth remain silent.

For the war crimes committed in Prisade there has never been a single trial or judicial process.

The Red Berets

Thank you for visiting me. The days in hospital are long, and the days I have been left to live are numbered. *Terminal cancer!* A bolt from the blue! Their doctors put it bluntly to you, they tell you straight away the prognosis and how many days have been left for you. I don't need words of comfort! I've lived a life worth a lifetime of two persons, for me - a better person, who you met here in America, and for me – a worse person, who no one knew, and who I left behind in the Balkans. From the latter me I ran away to save my life. Now, when there is no more escaping, I'll tell you the truth: I'm not a refugee like you, I'm a policeman, a fugitive after the war. I lied to you so you wouldn't turn me away; in your hometown, which we talked about a lot, I didn't actually serve in the compulsory army service before the war. I had been a soldier during the war. And no ordinary soldier, but a special forces soldier in the secret Unit for special operations.

It's a long story, I'll make it short and include only the most important parts. You think about what you'll do with it. Only naïve people believe the war is over. The war still goes on! If you publish the story, you might risk your life; some might believe you know more than you're revealing, you could die crossing the road, in a restroom in a café; maybe the beer waiting for you on the table could be your last! Or you could fall out of a boat, slip while mountaineering into an abyss... lots of bad things could happen to you! If out of fear you keep quiet about what I tell you now I completely understand. It's all up to you!

The name I carry is fake. I left my real one back where I'd be killed or sent to court for, as they call it, a "collaborative criminal undertaking".

Red berets are not worn for decoration.

I was in the most elite unit of the Serbian National Security Service. Before that I had never worn a uniform, even though I was a professional policeman, a "secret agent" – a double player. In the first league I was playing for our team, and from the "stands" occasionally for another foreign agency. Every-

thing I did was for money, but I was also of the belief that what I was doing was for the good of my people. Two or three years before the war, the media and the politicians and the church dignitaries were bombarding us with news and stories of how Serbs outside of Serbia were endangered. It was inescapable. I was deeply convinced that I was "serving my people".

When things were brewing in Croatia, Milošević ordered Jovica Stanišić, the head of the State Security Service, to organise "an appropriate formation for the defence of the Serb people outside of Serbia". Franko Simatović developed the task and prepared a group for the field work. **(See Endnote I)**

It wasn't allowed to become public knowledge that we from Serbia were meddling in the "log revolution"[8], Frenki[9] was pretending to be a journalist working for "Politika-Ekspres", and I was supposedly his photographer, with a camera, bulletproof vest, and an MP5 machine gun. In Belgrade we met with Milan Martić and a special forces soldier from Australia, Dragan Vasiljković, and made an agreement to train men from Lika[10] for actions in which they don't ask any questions, at the centre for training army personnel in Golubić. The instructors received code names: Captain Dragan, Žika the Montenegrin, Meda, and Major Fića. All the logistics came through us - from the finances to the red hats which we would hand out after the attack on Glina. From April to August 1991, around 3000 members of the police and the Territorial Defence Force SAO Krajina passed through our camp. The official date of the formation of the Unit for Specialist Operations, Department of National Security, was the 4th of May, 1991. Its core consisted of 30 special forces soldiers from Department of National Security of Serbia, the best police officers from Knin, and volunteers from paramilitary groups in Serbia. That was one of our branches. At the other end, in eastern Slavonija, where the Serbian Democratic Party (SDS) also depended on support from Belgrade, Badža formed a second part of the unit which included Arkan and his Serb Volunteer Guard, a motley crew of underground scum with fat dossiers with the police. They were based in Erdut, where they were joined by Milorad Ulemek Legija, later one of the most notable member of the special

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8 The "Log Revolution" started in May 1990 as an uprising of ethnic Serbs in areas of Republic Croatia populated by ethnic Serbs who protested against the new Croatian government by blockading main roads using logs cut from nearby woods, which further escalated into armed conflicts and the area was self-proclaimed Serbian Autonomous Region (SAO) Krajina

9 Franko = Frenki (nickname)

10 A region in Croatia populated by ethnic Serbs

forces, alumni of the French League. Towards the end of the conflict in Croatia, Frenki transferred our best "National Security officers" and soldiers from Knin ("Kninjas") soldiers from Krajina (Croatia) to an abandoned motel called "Ležimir" in Fruška Gora (Serbia). The core of the Unit was made up of the twenty-eight of us, a handpicked group. During the training new candidates would arrive, volunteers from Serbia. Then the National Security formed a second camp in Pajzoš near Ilok. There were all kinds of people there, from professionals like us to criminals released from jail in return for their "patriotic engagement". On the field they were wild and furious: they would steal, beat, and kill for no reason.

Who selected the "volunteers"? These two: Jovica Stanišić, the Head of the National Security, and my boss, Frenki Simatović, the Leader of the Second Command. It is said that Mihalj Kertes and Brana Crnčević "whispered commands". Frenki wanted the Red Berets to become a part of the regular police force in Serbia, but due to "political reasons" the Unit would remain invisible and continue to operate in the highest secrecy. After the training, and modelled after special units in western countries, we were called "instructors". As soon as the war moved into Bosnia, we received new tasks. We were divided into two fighting groups. In each of those operational groups there were 40-50 members. The Red Berets were meant to be a striking force in all strategic places until the police forces and the army of Republika Srpska were formed. At the same time, we had to train new recruits - expand the Unit. The war, surely it's not a secret anymore, had been long prepared in army offices, but new fighters had to be created quickly. The Yugoslav National Army gave the weapons to the Serbs on the terrain; however, no one knew how to fight in a war. The army had tanks and guns, but at the beginning of the war what they were missing was - balls! We needed brave and dangerous men for fast operations like taking villages and towns and clearing the terrain. This is why our most important task was to organise and train local police and army forces, from which we would recruit new Red Berets. After Ležimir, Frenki chose 28 elite instructors, and divided us into groups for quick, specialized training. The principle was as simple as can be: local politicians from SDS would recommend the chosen candidates and we would make them into fighters.

We didn't have a lot of time; we developed a plan for intensive training that would last three weeks. We enforced a demanding drill and training for anti-terrorist operations, all in an abbreviated procedure: endurance training,

martial arts training, topography, handling of arms and explosive ordnances. At the end of the training, we would give them the red berets. The best of them would be promoted to instructors who would continue, based on the idea of the inverted pyramid, to train others in other centres. Believe it or not, in the end the Red Berets had around 3000 members in Bosnia!

At the very beginning of the war, one part of the unit was transferred from Fruška Gora by helicopter to the headquarters of Ratko Mladić in Han Pijesak. From there we were transferred to Sarajevo. They took us to the Police Academy in Vrace where we received our first operation tasks. The other part of the Unit received their instructions in Pajzoš, near Ilok, to take over Bosanski Šamac. This group was led by Lugar, Crni and Debeli.[11]

After Sarajevo, I was allocated to the group headed to Ozren. The camp was close to the Orthodox Monastery. The place is called Ćaćinovac. At the beginning of April, before the war began in your town, there were around 500 armed people in various formations and units on Ozren: members of the Yugoslav National Army, Territorial Defense, "Predo's Wolves", "White Eagles", and us, the Red Berets. The army commander was Major Milovan Stanković, the commander of the Military Tactics Group Ozren, and our commander was colonel Radojica Božović, code name Kobac.[12] We didn't use our real names. And no one could ask for our real names. We were "coded" with our nicknames: Montenegrin, Njegoš, Riki, Drača, Bambi, Dikac, Kovač, Wolf... **(See Endnote II)**

We had two sets of identification: one from the Serbian National State Security for use in Serbia and the second one from the police in Republika Srpska for use in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Krajina. **(Endnote III)**

In The Hague we were accused of murder, deportation, and forced relocation of the local population. I'm not defending myself, a lot happened, what was planned and what wasn't planned. The war drew in all sorts of vultures from all sides; Šešelj[13]'s supporters and independent warring units consisting of volunteers, which were actually just thieving gangs. However, everyone's panties shook before us, before the real Red Berets. No one was allowed to utter a word when the Berets showed up. Not the police, nor the army! We were above them all and we weren't subordinate to anyone's orders!

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11 Nicknames: Woodsman, Dark-Haired man, Fat man

12 Code name: Hawk

13 Vojislav Šešelj, a Bosnian ethnic Serb, politician, leader of the Serbian Nationalist Party, convicted by ICTY for crimes against humanity for his role in instigating deportation of the Croatian ethnic minorities from Serbian village of Hrtkovci in 1992

Frenki visited us many times on the Ozren mountain. He would fly there by helicopter, wearing an elegant civilian outfit, with Ray Ban sunglasses. He would announce himself with his full name and surname and say that he was coming in the name of the state of Serbia and that we were knights upon whom the future of the fate of the Serbian people depended. We trained 300 fighters in a short span of time. We trained "Predo's Wolves", "Jorga's Group", "Miće", "The Wolves from Vučijak". We were supposed to be professional fighters, and for the most part we were, but things began to spin out of control because of all the thieves and criminals among us.

Taking Doboj was easier than we expected it to be, on the night between the 2nd and 3rd of May, 1992. Major Milovan Stanković, counterintelligence officer of the Yugoslav National Army, had created a military strategic plan and prepared in advance the occupation of the town. **(Endnote IV)**

He had moved arms in strategic locations and established checkpoints that were manned by a combination of police and army personnel. In the commanding centre on Ozren we knew from the first day of training that we were preparing an attack on Doboj. We were told that we had to pre-empt the Green Berets[14] and the HVO[15] units which also had plans to claim the territory and cut across the region of Posavina. Actually, the Zenge and Hosovci[16] and members of the HVO had already arrived at Kotorsko and Johovac! The Green Berets and "The Patriotic League"[17] were already positioned at the Čaršija. They kept guard in civilian clothing, armed with guns. It was a question of timing who would take Doboj first! We had a collaborative military operation where all the Serb forces joined together, around 1500-2000 soldiers, police, reserve soldiers, and paramilitary groups, mostly "White Eagles" from Ser-

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14 Green Berets, initially paramilitary forces consisting of ethnic Bosniaks, formed in early 1992 from demobilized soldiers and conscripts of the Yugoslav National Army, and from the second half of 1992 integrated in the Army of Bosnia and Herzegovina

15 HVO – Croatian Council of Defense, paramilitary forces consisting of ethnic Croats in Bosnia and Herzegovina, fought against the army of Republika Srpska, but later also against the Army of Bosnia and Herzegovina. After the Dayton Peace Agreement was signed in 1995 which ended the war HVO was incorporated into the Army of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

16 Members of Croatian military formations – the Croatian National Guard (Zbor narodne garde) established in Croatia in 1991, and predecessors to the Croatian National Army; Croatian Army Forces (HOS) established in Croatia in 1991 and comprised of soldiers from Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina (of Croatian ethnicity)

17 A paramilitary organisation aiming to incorporate all patriotic, pro-Bosnian and pro-civic oriented people to defend Bosnia and Herzegovina

bia, and a group of special forces soldiers from Niš[18]. The operation started at exactly 8 pm in front of the school in the village of Lipac. We expected greater resistance so the task to occupy the core points in the town, especially the police station, was assigned to the Red Berets, which included members from their Unit in Serbia, and locals we had trained on Ozren - around 300 people in total.

The operation was effected surprisingly, and unexpectedly quickly and the population did not show any resistance. It lasted about five hours. During the night we disarmed and detained members of police staff, and occupied strategically important buildings and other objects. During the occupation of the town, right before dawn, we encountered small resistance from Čaršija and Orašje, where one of ours died and two were wounded. The next day we surrounded the Radio Doboj building and the National Defense Headquarters and escorted all the employees to the police station where they had to sign a document pledging their allegiance to the new Serb authorities...

Yes, we beat people, interrogated them, arrested them, from day one. Fear is a primal, genetically imprinted emotion. All the police in the world know that fear is their ally: it betrays friends, creates informants, makes the great feel small, and forces them to be loyal. Our goal was to spread fear. But not the ordinary kind of fear, which one might feel they can escape; we wanted to create the deep kind of fear bordering on panic and terror, one that is inescapable, where victims succumb completely. When fear like that takes hold, you have a submissive population which will keep quiet and won't dare to speak up for the rest of their lives. Why do you think none of your journalist friends dare to write about the war in Doboj to this day? The Serbs are embarrassed and fear retaliation, and the Bosniaks and Croats, who still have properties in those parts, keep quiet out of fear! Fear is our best ally, always was and always will be! We learned how to create fear. We were masters of fear! We beat everyone in our path, on the street and in jail. We all beat the prisoners! Kobac was the only one who didn't beat them; he forced them to sing chetnik songs, gave out death threats, and ordered them around. And when he ordered you around, it was worse than being beaten.

Njegoš was the cruellest. He created fear and trembling for all. Even Serbs ran away from him when he appeared on the streets. **(See Endnote V)**

18 A town in Serbia

In Doboj, the month of May was rife with blood and screaming. Jails were too small. We had a list of about 300 Croats and Bosniaks, potential enemies, which was compiled by the Serb Democratic Party (SDS) in Doboj. If we found someone from that list, the order was – extermination. How many people were killed I really don't know. I didn't bother with statistics! As soon as the Crisis Headquarters of the Serb municipality of Doboj gained control, we intensified our training. We created a new centre on the premises of the primary school in Vila. We had 120 new candidates sign up. We had to demonstrate that there was no mercy for the ustaše and mudžahedins. We brought prisoners from the jails in Doboj so that the new recruits could beat them to "strengthen their morale". The prisoners suffered running through their gauntlet and they [the "trainees"] recognised them and some of them hesitated; we could then see who was ready to obey orders and commands without a second thought. Riki and Dikac killed six civilians they had brought out of the Doboj jail as an example. They spilled petrol on them and set them on fire. Some woman was yelling "Chetniks!" when we raided her house which was near the school. We lit her house on fire and didn't let her escape. In the village of Makljenovac everyone had fled, the only people remained there were some old women. We shot them near the football pitch... A lot of things happened that aren't worth retelling: raping little girls, beheading people, looting, burning. War is a disgusting affair. A beast awakens in a man that one isn't aware exists in him until an opportunity for it to show arises. The innocent and guiltless, unfortunately, suffer. The beast within you doesn't think: they don't have weapons, they aren't really dangerous, but you feel hatred towards them because they're weak and powerless. The uniform and weapons you have make you feel powerful. You're the master of their lives.

Fear makes people submissive and completely insignificant. Spreading fear is a part of psychological warfare which is more deadly than bullets. We trained the local Red Berets how to do it: from harmless shooting from the top of skyscrapers, to spreading false news that Muslim snipers were still in town, to raiding apartments and houses, arresting and taking people to the jail which was getting too full. We let some go home so we could arrest new people, and then we'd arrest the same people we let go all over again. They were shaking with fear when they'd see us. Already, at the beginning of May, the decision was made to create new, temporary jails and concentration camps in the barracks of the Yugoslav National Army in Miljkovac, the army barracks near the cemetery in Bare, the army hangars in Usora, in Ševarlije, and Perčo's disco club. They were the main jails, but there were smaller ones

all around: in the school in the village Kostajnica, in the village Stanari, in the cooperative farm building in Sjenina Rijeka, in the factory of transmission lines in Rudanka, in Podnovlje, in the basements of the train station... There was a total of 33 detention facilities, and according to my estimates, around 5000 civilians were jailed. We beat them without mercy! Some succumbed to the beatings, and some were taken into the night, if we suspected them of pro Croat or Muslim inclinations. How many of them died? Who knows? No one kept a record of it. No one was allowed to talk! When we entered the jails, the prisoners had to look down at the ground. Whoever lifted their head up would get a beating! Everyone's lives were hanging by a thread! We collected thirty prisoners from the concentration camp in Usora. They were killed on Ozren and buried in mass graves near the main headquarters of the Red Berets. Doboj itself became a big concentration camp for all the Muslims and Croats. No one needed to be forced to leave, they were all keen to be exchanged[19], to escape the Red Berets, "Predo's Wolves", Jorga, Karaga, all of it.

The town at that time was full of different uniforms. The "Martić's" and "Šešelj's soldiers" and the "White Eagles" arrived, as well as various local units that no one could really control. The local Serbs would denounce where the Croats and Muslims lived, and then an armed gang would go from door to door looting, beating, and raping. When the corridor was broken and the channel was established for the transport of goods from Serbia to Bosnia, convoys of looted goods such as stolen televisions, household appliances, were driven in the opposite direction. The most profitable item was the Volkswagen "golf" car. According to official records from the Police Headquarters in Doboj, in 1992 around two thousand cars of different types were stolen. In Serbia, connections between resellers, mobsters and the mafia were established. In Doboj there were a few groups of war profiteers; the first group worked for Raja **(Endnote VI)** , the second for Predo, the third for Karaga, and the fourth, called "Miće", worked for Ninković. And let's not forget Jorga. **(See Endnote VII)**

The most profitable business was stealing expensive machinery from factories in Doboj. A lot of them disappeared! In the "Trudbenik" Factory of pneumatic tools, based in Bare, two machines were dissembled and taken away. Before that, they had just arrived from Germany and had cost around a million Deutsche Marks each! Where they ended up, don't ask! It's best not to

19 To be exchanged for Serb captives detained by Croats or Bosniaks in the territories under their control.

know anything about big secrets and large amounts of money. The local reprobates were too insignificant for such undertakings.

Towards the end of May, Božović ordered us to expel everyone from the village Bukovačke Čivčije, a wholly Muslim village. We crammed them onto seven buses. Four buses were driven to the suburb of Ušće, where we exchanged them for captured Serbs, and three buses were driven to our training headquarters in Vila. We separated the women and children to one side. They were exchanged later on as well, but the men were taken to the Collection Centre in Usora, and to Perčo's disco. After the attack by the Croats and Muslims on Putnik Hill on the 12th of July, 1992, they, along with the other prisoners from the camps, served as our human shield. The local Serbs were furious. A lot of Serb fighters had died, and they wanted revenge. The Red Berets and "Predo's Wolves" took 50 prisoners out from Perčo's disco club. We put the captives in formations of five rows and forced them to walk to the front lines. To warn them not to try to escape, Golub shot one of them in the back of the head. We made them move forwards, and we followed closely behind. As soon as they stepped out not far from the school in Vila the shooting started. In the chaos the prisoners tried to run away. We shot them in the back. More than half of them died... **(Endnote VIII)**

In June, two of our groups from the Special Forces Unit attacked Johovac and Kotorsko. The first was led by Riki, and the second by "Wolf". We were securing the front lines and had the instruction to kill anyone we encountered. In Johovac all the remaining civilians who didn't want to leave were killed, including four disabled persons and two children. In Kotorsko we caught a number of "Zengas" and shot them on the spot. In Šešlije we imprisoned the commander of the 112th Unit of the Zengas. Kobac personally ordered for his execution without a trial. Bambi followed out the orders... **(See Endnote IX)**

I was on Ozren and in Doboj for four months. Then I was "reassigned" to training camps in Tara, then in Bratunac, Zvornik, Grahovo, Prijedor, and Sanski Most. We assisted Fikret Abdić who broke away from Sarajevo political and national defense centre and proclaimed his Autonomous Region of Western Bosnia. We sold weapons and munition simultaneously to his enemies, general Dudaković, and to his Fifth Army Corps. Both paid for our services. We had our price. The profit was unimaginable!

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20 "Pauk" means Spider

When Abdić was expelled from Kladuša, we started a counterattack, the operation "Pauk"[20]. We were divided into three strategic groups: the first was led by Babo, the second was commanded by Legija, and the third was led by Rajo Božović, the colonel of the Red Berets. Fikret Abdić returned to power, but only for a short time, until the end of his autonomous region, in August 1995.

When the Dayton Agreement[21] was signed, I returned to Serbia and continued to work with the Unit. It was a crazy time. Sometimes I felt like the war was better. There were too many of us! All the Red Berets from the wars in Croatia and Bosnia couldn't become paid members of the Unit, only the chosen ones, so many of them became involved in various private agencies for security, detective work, or as security guards. Some received "special temporary work" as racketeers of business people, debt collectors, drug smugglers, money launderers, or hitmen in numerous conflicts occurring in the "underworld". When the Unit was formally reorganised to include members of the Red Berets and Arkan's Guard, in Spring 1996, it was headed by Milorad Ulemek Legija. All the murky business in Serbia went through the National Security Services. No one could do anything without paying a tax to the Department of National Security. Unbelievably dangerous things were going on. We were protecting the elites and the newly minted millionaires, assisted by criminal gangs. Crime was blossoming on all sides. In April 1997, the Minister of the Serbian Police Radovan Stojičić Badža was assassinated. No one mentioned it but at the investigation they discovered a bag with 300,000 Deutsche Marks. Dance with the devil and you will get burned!

With the war dogs - criminals on one side and corrupt politicians on the other - there couldn't be any progress or peace. There was a long line of settling mutual accounts, and mysterious murders. A car stops at a traffic light, the window with the tinted glass slowly opens, and a shooting follows. The list of who was murdered is long, including both well known, and lesser known people. Slavko Ćuruvija the independent journalist was killed. He wrote something bad about someone. Legija attempted to assassinate Vuk Drašković, and then he kidnapped and killed Ivan Stambolić, the ex-Prime Minister of Serbia, obeying orders from Milošević. He was assassinated in Fruška Gora and buried in a lime pit. Then Arkan was assassinated. Who ordered this is still unknown and might never be revealed. Arkan knew too much, and wanted too much. The collaboration between the Mafia and the

21 Dayton Peace Agreement ended the 1992-1995 war in Bosnia and Herzegovina

National Security Service was stronger than ever. Milošević lost the elections in October 2000. The sandcastles started washing away. Nine months later, the Unit was involved in his arrest and handover to The Hague Tribunal. But that wasn't the end of it. The Zemun Clan was under the patronage of the Red Berets. As a continuation of organised crime, unexplained murders in Belgrade kept happening.

The Unit surpassed all levels of government. Its moto was: "The Unit is Stronger Than Anything!" No one could touch us; not the army, nor the police. And no one could say anything – they'd be killed. The Unit was made up of the most equipped, trained, and ruthless criminals the Balkans had ever seen! The premier of Serbia Zoran Đinđić was determined to stand up to the Red Berets and organised crime. A special court was established and the police were finally ready for action. But too late! Members of the Unit assassinated the premier. Đinđic was assassinated on the 12th of March 2003. That evening it was announced that Milorad Ulemek Legija, Zvezdan Jovanović "Zmija" and the Zemun Clan[22] were behind it. It was the end of the Unit! It was disbanded that same month upon the arrest of the command staff. Legija was on the run; he turned himself in after 14 months in hiding.

Belgrade became too hot and dangerous for me. Not only did I have to escape as quickly as I could, I also had to change my identity. I received a new passport and visa overnight, first to enter a certain European country, and then papers to move to Canada. Don't ask how, nor why, nor from whom. I can't, and am not allowed, to tell anyone! That secret will go with me to the grave.

I had two names and two lives. I'm just sorry that this other life, the easier and nicer one, didn't last longer.

22 Organised criminals from Zemun, near Belgrade

(I) Jovica Stanišić and Franko Simatović were tried before The International Hague Tribunal in The Hague for war crimes in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. They were tried on five separate accounts for crimes against humanity and violations of laws and customs of warfare committed by persecution, murders, deportations, and other inhumane acts. According to the indictment which proved the direct involvement of Serbia in the wars in Croatia and Bosnia, the crimes were committed by the units of the Serbian State Security Services, specifically the units and paramilitary formations which were created, or aided by the Serbian State Security Services. Amongst those units were the Red Berets (which acted under the guise of many names), members of the Martić's police, and the police forces of the so-called SAO (Serbian Autonomous Region) of Slavonija, Baranja and the West Srijem. The court process lasted ten years. By the first-instance verdict of the 3rd May 2013, both were acquitted, to the surprise of the international community. The court was presided by Alphons Orie from The Netherlands, Michele Picard from France, and Elizabeth Gwaunza from Zimbabwe were the judges in the court panel. The decision wasn't made unanimously. Judge Picard dissented on the acquittal. The prosecution immediately announced their appeal. On the 15th of December 2015, The Appeals Chamber of the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia ordered that the trial of Stanišić and Simatović be renewed due to procedural court errors, The retrial for war crimes on all accounts of the initial indictment ended with the first-instance verdict on 30th of June, 2021, by which these two accused were sentenced to 12 years in prison each for aiding and abetting the persecution, murders, deportations and forced relocation of Croats and Muslims from Bosanski Šamac in the spring of 1992. It was established that the crimes committed in the municipality in the north of Bosnia and Herzegovina were committed by special units of the Serbian forces – the Red Berets, which were controlled by Stanišić and Simatović. Due to the fact that the Prosecuting Chamber didn't prove their guilt for crimes committed in five other municipalities in Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as in Croatia, specifically in Kninska Krajina and eastern Slavonia in the period between 1991-1995, analysts believe that this verdict is "a kind of compromise", but it undoubtedly proves Serbia's direct involvement in inciting and waging wars in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Not a single member of the Red Berets, despite countless testimonies given by witnesses of their atrocities committed in Bosnia and Herzegovina, has been charged or prosecuted for their actions by the competent courts for war crimes in the Republic of Serbia.

(II) During the festivities marking the anniversary of the Unit for Special Operations (JSO), held in Kula on the 4th of May, 1997, which was attended by the president of Serbia, Slobodan Milošević, there was a camera in attendance also. The tape wasn't intended for the public; it was meant to be viewed internally, but someone brought it to The Hague six years later where it became a key evidence of Serbia's involvement in the wars in Croatia and Bosnia. In the opening "speech" to the distinguished guest, Frenki Simatović gave a detailed account of everything that had been kept in secret to impress his special guest - everything about the forming of the Unit and its path in the war. During the ceremony they handed out certificates of achievement to those who deserved them. On a list of around a hundred names, which became known to The Hague Criminal Tribunal, code names of the Red Berets from 1992 were mistakenly revealed. That is how, amongst others, the following were mentioned: colonel Radojica Božović "Kobac", major Davor Subotić "Riki", captain Nikola Lončar, Zvezdan Jovanović "Zmija", Živojin Ivanović "Crnogorac", Njegoslav Kušić "Njegoš", Aleksandar Vuković "Vuk", Slobodan Miljković "Lugar", Dragan Đorđević "Crni", Srećko Radovanović "Debeli", Stevo Lukić "Bambi", Dragan Stojiljković "Kapetan Dragan", Radovan Stojičić "Badža", Dragoljub Filipović "Major Fića", Milan Radonjić "Meda"...

(III) According to the indictment against Stanišić and Simatović, in the camp of the Unit based in Ležimir in Fruška Gora, which the aforementioned regularly visited, were all those who would later come to Doboj as "instructors" upon completing their training. During their training National Security of Serbia gave them equipment, weapons, and all other logistical necessities, and on two occasions they also provided them with envelopes containing freshly printed Serbian dinars. On the first occasion it was the equivalent of 2,000 Deutsche Marks, and then 4,000 Deutsche Marks. Upon occupying Doboj the group was put on the payroll of the Agency for Public Security – Police Station in Doboj. In May 1992, they received a "salary" which was 30,000 Serbian dinars. On the payroll were: Radojica Božović, commander, Davor Subotić, deputy, Petar Zbućinović, Nedeljko Kovač, Nedeljko Drača, Njegoš Kušić, Đurica Banjac, Miodrag Lazić, Milenko Popović, Nikola Lončar, Nenad Kujundžić. On the pay list which had a large heading, titled Grupa od Crnogoraca (Group of Montenegrins), two more names were added by hand, Milan Dimić and Boško Sremac, numbered 12 and 13. Payment to "the Montenegrins" was signed by the Police Station Chief, Obren Petrović. Even though Serbia didn't "officially" participate in the war, the Serbian State Security Service would continue to send regular salaries to the

families of their Security Service members who died in Croatia and Bosnia. Milan Dimić, a member of the Red Berets, died on the 13th of July in Doboj, and the Service would continue to pay out a "double salary", paying 62 full pay checks in the period from 1992-1995. He was posthumously recognised with an award for his achievements in 1996. It was a fact that only in 1996 did the members of the Unit for Special Operations become officially employed by the Ministry of Internal Affairs. Until then they were "contractors". While writing the truth about the Red Berets, a correspondent-commentator for the Belgrade newspaper "Vreme" (Time), issue 634, dated 27th February 2003, wondered "since when are employees of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Republic of Serbia, even on temporary contracts, sent to war in the territories of other countries?"

(IV) Milovan Stanković, major of the Yugoslav National Army, an officer of the counterintelligence forces (KOS), was at the head of the Military Tactical Group Ozren, consisting of four brigades of the Yugoslav National Army, reserves, territorial defense, and Serb paramilitary formations: "White Eagles", "Predo's Wolves", and others. He commanded the operation of occupying Doboj, where 15,000 civilians were forcibly expelled from their homes. He ordered the shelling of Prisade, Makljenovac, Grapska, where many unarmed civilians lost their lives. He didn't use his command responsibility and power to stop the looting of abandoned villages and murdering of dozens of civilians who didn't want to leave their homes. According to the information of the Research and Documentation Centre in Sarajevo (IDC), in the Doboj region more than 2,000 people died in the war, while 104 are still listed as missing. Despite all of this, there were no criminal charges pressed against Milovan Stanković. He lives in Serbia, in the outskirts of Šabac.

(V) Njegoslav Kušić "Njegoš" has not, to this day, been held accountable for his evil actions in Doboj, even though he is (horribly) remembered by every prisoner in the jails and concentration camps. He lives in Čačak (a town in Serbia) and he is known to the police there as a dark, hot-tempered, and aggressive person. In a conflict with the police in 2008 because the "music was too loud", he was wounded in his own café. He often hires famous singers, and the like, and likes to pose in photos with them. One can find his photos on Instagram.

(VI) The name of Radojica "Raja" Božović, a police colonel, is mentioned from the first day of the establishment of the Unit for Special Operations. He actively participated in the SAO Krajina and then in the camps in Fruška Gora, Ozren, Doboj, Tara, Bajina Bašta, Skelani. The last war task assigned

to the National Security of Serbia was to protect Fikret Abdić, assigned to him and Miodrag Ulemek "Legija".

- Predrag "Predo" Kujundžić, the leader of "Predo's Wolves", was arrested in October 2007. After two years in court before The Special Department for War Crimes of the Prosecutor's Office in Sarajevo he was pronounced guilty for crimes against humanity in Doboj. He was sentenced to 22 years in prison. After an appeal, in January 2011, the Appellation Chamber of the Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina sentenced him to 17 years in prison. He died during the sentence in 2022.

(VII) Nikola Jorgić "Jorga" was arrested in 1995, in Germany, at the airport in Düsseldorf. Before the Supreme State Court of the German province of North Rhine Westphalia, for genocide committed in Grapska, Doboj and Ševarlije, murder of 30 persons, causing serious bodily injuries and illegal, forced imprisonment of civilians, he was sentenced on the 26th of September 1997 to four life sentences. He died in his jail cell on the 8th of June 2014.

* The "Miće" was a paramilitary formation which operated in the regions of Doboj and Teslić, formed by Milan Ninković, the president of SDS in Doboj, a member of the Crisis Headquarters of the Serb Municipality, Doboj, and for a time, Minister for Defence of Republika Srpska. At the request of the Prosecutor's Office of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Special Department for War Crimes, Milan Ninković, Borislav Paravac, Andrija Bjelošević and Milan Savić were indicted for a collaborative criminal undertaking. Paravac was the head of the Crisis Headquarters, Bjelošević the head of the Centre for Security, and Savić was his deputy. The indictment claimed that from the period of May 1992 to the end of 1993, as participants of a collaborative criminal undertaking, they carried out the persecution and forcibly exiled the Bosniak and Croat populations, along with murders, illegal arrests, and other inhumane acts. The process is still ongoing.

* Slobodan Karagić "Karaga" has, on more than one occasion, been indicted and sentenced for (war) crimes committed in Doboj. In the latest case, in a judicial process that was completed in 2018, the Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina sentenced Slobodan Karagić to 12 years in prison for raping two underage girls, and for war crimes committed against the civilian population in Doboj in 1992.

(VIII) In the first court proceedings, in the final defence before the judicial panel in The Hague Tribunal, the lawyers of Jovica Stanišić and Franko Simatović rejected the allegations of the prosecution about the participation and involvement of their clients and the State Security of Serbia in the war in

Bosnia and Herzegovina. They claimed that all persons who came from Serbia to participate in the war and to train the Red Berets had nothing to do with them and that they were on the payroll of the Central Agency for Security, Doboj, Radojica Božović being amongst the first ones on the list. In their closing arguments, the defence asserted, amongst other things, that Božović couldn't have had any effect on the crimes committed in Doboj, especially in the instance of taking the prisoners from Perčo's Disco and using them as a human shield at Vila on the 12th of July, as he had been, allegedly, in hospital for almost one whole month, from the 26th of June to the 23rd of July 1992.

(IX) Colonel Radojica Rajo Božović from Podgorica (Montenegro), a member of the Unit for Special Operations of the Serbian State Security Services, to this day hasn't been held accountable for his actions before any court. The Human Rights Foundation in Belgrade, on the 21st of June 2017, filed criminal charges against him for the war crimes committed by him in Doboj from May to August 1992. The application to court which was brought to the Prosecutor's Office for War Crimes in Serbia, includes two others belonging to the same unit, although their names weren't publicized. "The reported persons are suspected, in the period of May to August 1992, to have forcibly exiled hundreds of Bosniaks from the village near Doboj Bukovačke Čivčije, killed one member of the Croatian National Guard, stole from civilians, and assaulted and tortured civilians imprisoned in the regional jail in Doboj", stated the Human Rights Foundation on their website. In their report they state that "to this day not a single member of the Red Berets has been processed before their home (Serbian) courts for the crimes committed during the conflicts in ex-Yugoslavia. Because of this, the Foundation for Criminal Law calls upon the Prosecutor's Office, Department of War Crimes, to investigate the claims from the aforementioned criminal file, to process the accountable and responsible ones, and to offer victims the right to the truth after 25 years."

Radojica Božović became well known to the public after 1996 as the manager and owner of the football club "Zeta" from Golubovac, not far from Podgorica. Thanks to Božović and his influence, the club grew from a small provincial team to become the leader of the Montenegrin Football League, and a participant of the UEFA league. Because of numerous incidents and threats to referees, he was banned from the Football Association of Montenegro for life. Currently, he is the manager of the Football Club "Partizan" from Belgrade, and is always accompanied by a bodyguard. He commented on the criminal charges with these words: "I didn't commit crimes, but I

commanded heroically and in a manly way, which is inherent to Serbian officers. I am proud of my duties as an officer in the Red Berets and for helping my Serb brothers whenever they needed it." There aren't many sources in the media regarding his wartime past, but his name appeared in the papers in 2013 when he hosted Zdravko Mamić, the head of "Dinamo" from Zagreb, in Belgrade. The Croatian media commented on Mamić's inappropriate meeting with the colonel of the Unit for Special Operations which had "caused monstrous murders and mass massacres in the region of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Croatia". Božović's reply to the Belgrade newspaper "Politika" was as follows: "People, the war has been over for almost twenty years now and for years, successful people from all over ex-Yugoslavia have been drinking and eating together, and visiting each other. I sincerely don't see what the problem is."

Nineteen Ninety-Two

The painter wore a long military overcoat with red lining on the lapel and epaulet. It had once belonged to someone from Tito's guards and one can only wonder which mysterious roads this attire trophy travelled to come from Topčider[23] to Bosnia. Once, with polished leather boots, he had marched in front of the Supreme Commander[24], and now, standing near Šljuka's newspaper kiosk, he stared bemusedly at passers-by. Spring had caught its step, it wasn't cold, and his greyish-olive uniform wasn't a necessity, but décor of the moment. This surreal image was framed by the most important detail: the artist wore a machine gun on his left shoulder! A twenty kilo incongruous object from the old war, also a trophy, most likely came from the local museum.

"How are you, Bane?" a friend in jeans asked him.

The painter didn't stutter, but he had a specific way of speaking - throaty and slow - and a miserly vocabulary.

"The country has to defend itself from the Ustaše[25]!" he squeezed out.

The long wavy hair extended over the lapel of the overcoat, and his yellowish beard and moustache was beaded with sweat from this difficult performance. The artist, in his long coat and heavy machine gun, walked from the kiosk at the edge of the park to the High School Centre where only a week before he had taught students history of fine art. He was quite well known to everyone in the town, and had the same response ready:

"The country has to defend itself from the Ustaše!" Sweat trickled down his face from the heavy weight of the overcoat and the machine gun.

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23 Topčider is a suburb in Belgrade where guard barracks are situated

24 Reference to President Tito, the Supreme Commander of the Yugoslav Army

25 Ustaše – members of a Croatian Nazi supporting military movement from the Second World War. Here, a nationalist and derogatory reference to members of the Croatian army or ordinary citizens in the 1990s as well.

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Due to a mysterious fault in the transmitter near the garrison, Radio Doboj didn't air its usual program on Saturday, 2nd of May. The next day, the transmitter started working, and even more mysteriously, the fault – disappeared. This was the beginning of the war program of Serbian Radio Doboj, which would apply all the knowledge the chief editor of the radio program acquired during his stay in Zemun[26] a year or two beforehand, including army lectures for chosen reserve officers, and counterintelligence officers. He didn't have a rank in the army, but he was regularly invited to such two-day weekend seminars for which he was financially remunerated. In the first days of the war, Radio Doboj was of crucial importance to the information and propaganda, vastly ahead of its "enemy side".

The "program" started before the microphone was even turned on – by lining up the workers and verbally firing them all.

"If your people had come to take Doboj the way they had planned, you wouldn't let me go the way I am letting you go!", said Zoran, the chief editor, to Salih, the sound engineer. Salko[27] quietly left the room that had been a second home to him. For twenty-five years he had been the alpha and omega in the place, one of the first professionals and founders of that local radio. The music editor Eso also lost his job. He was told he had been "waitlisted". Sergije and Fahrudin, the journalists, were also fired. Those who remained that day had to go to the police station to sign a document stating their allegiance to the new Serb leadership.

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The first shots fired from the tank guns located in Lipac[28] towards the houses and roofs of Čaršija, the old town, terrified the crows. The birds left their nests in the little park by the Green Market and fled to the central park named after the National Heroes[29]. The heroes had their busts carved in marble which stood on a stone memorial pedestal. Now Ismet, Josip, Simo, Miloš, Refik, and Tošo[30] were knocked down, and the crows cawed night and

26 A place in Serbia, 14 km North from Belgrade, an air/technical base and military centre

27 Salko – a usual nickname for male name Salih of Muslim background

28 A village near Doboj

29 Communist partisan heroes from World War 2

30 Reference to heroes and their names includes the common knowledge shared by the Bosnian population which identifies ethnic backgrounds they may come from based on their

day above them. The local radio announced that the town had been liberated, but the birds hadn't heard that news. Every explosion would momentarily jolt the cloud of birds which would fly from the recently blossomed chestnut branches into the air before they landed with frightened roars onto branches of their new, unsafe home. There was something miserable and at the same time ominous in their cawing which started to bother the new guardians of peace and order.

Njegoš[31] found a confiscated hunting rifle in the police station. With the traditional red Montenegrin cap, decorated with a long yellow tassel, he stood in front of the tall obelisk and ossuary memorial bearing the remains of the heroes of the old National Liberation War, and pointed the gun at the birds. Every shot was followed by a drop of a dead bird's body from the tree, followed by even louder croaking.

- *Bang-bang!*

The sound of that shot was different from the sound of guns which captured the town. On a scale of explosive sounds, it was softer and milder, like the birds' feathers falling from the branches.

- *Bang-bang!*

The hunter with the Montenegrin cap took his job very seriously; he wanted to end this noisy cawing that was disturbing his fellow soldiers, armed men in their colourful uniforms. After the shots fired in rhythmic succession, he opened the barrel and refilled it with two new bullets.

- *Bang-bang!*

The white pavement of the little paths winding through the park was black with dead crows. However accurate the striker's aim was, somehow there were more and more birds on the branches. Even though they don't fly at night, it seemed that through secret channels they repopulated their devastated ranks. They could fly away, they had wings, but as if they were enchanted by their hometown, they chose to stay. The next day there were even more of them and they were louder.

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names, and also this reference implies that even though the heroes were of different ethnic backgrounds, they fought for the same cause and sacrificed their lives for it

31 Petar II Petrović-Njegoš, commonly referred to simply as Njegoš, was a Prince-Bishop of Montenegro, poet and philosopher whose works are widely considered some of the most important in Montenegrin and Serbian literature. Here, it might be a reference to a soldier from Montenegro fighting along Serbs, or also a person's nickname

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There was a long queue from the doors of the Yugoslav National Army Home Building to the shoe shop *Borovo*. The radio had transmitted the news: "Who doesn't respond to the call for mobilization will bear all legal and material consequences!" Fear of this threat, incomplete but definitely dangerous, forced people out of their apartments and houses into that queue, to show, eventually, their loyalty to the new authority. They could hear a strange sound coming from the park:

- *Bang-bang!*

As they approached the building where they had to acquiesce to join the army, they could see a soldier with a Montenegrin cap shooting at the birds. This sick gesture made them feel even more dreary. They recognised the pale faces of their fellow locals. This was not the time for chitchat, and with the people who stood closest to them in the queue they would barely squeeze out a few words. They were ashamed of their own consent to queuing to sign up for mobilization, and also they were afraid of unwanted ears listening to a longer conversation. Two machine gun posts, to the left and right of the army building, along with sand-filled bags, ominously reminded them of the events a few days earlier. The radio had announced that due to huge citizen interest in and response to the mobilization, the curfew would be extended from eight to thirteen[32] hours. They were terrified and stood in the awkward silence. From the park they heard the crows cawing and the gloomy *crack-crack* sound.

At once, a commotion occurred. Two armed soldiers in colourful uniforms had recognised someone in the queue and removed him. Everyone else thought there was no hope for this person, watching in silence as he was taken away. The crows kept cawing. It was a cry from the crows being sentenced to death.

Most people looked down, knowing that no hope had been left for them behind the double doors where they would fill out the form and state their name, last name, position in the peacetime army formation during obligatory

32 This is ambiguous: it can mean "from 8.00 to 13.00 o'clock" (according to 24 hour time count), which is a five-hour period; or, that the previously imposed curfew was in the duration of 8 hours, but then it has been extended to 13 hours a day, which implies that due to large numbers of people being on streets to register for mobilisation, the time to do that has been shortened, so that during the 13 curfew hours no-one should be out, therefore people should hurry up to register as quickly as possible

army service, and answer the obligatory question if they had voted for an independent Bosnia and Herzegovina in the recent referendum.

Like the crows, they couldn't escape. They knew they would hear the ominous cawing even behind those double doors, and even longer, until they could push this memory out of their minds and forget. At the time they weren't sure if they'd forget the guy with the Montenegrin hat, and the evil sound of his shooting: *Bang-bang.*

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Izudin, the goalkeeper from the Doboj sports team "Željo", was recognised by two of the soldiers in military uniforms. They removed him from the queue and escorted him to the building of the Serbian Radio Doboj. Zoran hosted the radio program, "live".

"Dear listeners, the few staff at this radio have proven themselves worthy. Thanks to the radio waves of Radio Doboj at shortwave band frequencies of 96.3 megahertz, and on the middle wavelength of 1395 kilohertz, we bring you truthful and timely information on a daily basis, contributing to the reduction of panic and rumours, wishing that reason will prevail over these crazy war mongers who have deliberately pushed their own people as well as people from other nations into extermination.

We send the truth, and the Ustaše and Alija's[33] fighters send lies and propaganda. Even our recent colleague Mirudin, via Radio Sarajevo, has reported the rapes of women and torture of Muslims and Croats in concentration camps in Doboj! And you know full well that there is no raping or concentration camps! So now, Mirudin's brother has volunteered freely to come and bear witness to this fact via our radio waves."

There was a small red lamp in front of the microphone, and Izo[34] coughed quickly to clear his throat which had seized up from fear. From the other side of the clear glass window that separated the studio from the technical equipment - the microphone, tape recorder, and gramophone - those two soldiers in uniform stood. They awaited his answer and behaved as if the whole interview was thanks to them.

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33 Reference to Alija Izetbegović, first president of the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina who proclaimed its independence from the Former Yugoslavia after the referendum for independence vote in favour in February 1992

34 Izo – an abbreviated nickname of the male name Izudin

"Will you tell us," Zoran began, addressing the terrified guest in formal language, "do these things your brother talks about exist in Doboj?"

"No! I bear witness," the Željo goalkeeper quietly spoke. "There is no raping nor are there concentration camps in Doboj. Muslims aren't being assaulted. Everything they are reporting from Tešanj[35] is a lie! Because of these lies, now, live on the Radio Doboj, I formally renounce my brother Mirudin!"

The unexpected and unusual speech of the interviewee was completed by the radio host with this impromptu tirade: "See, dear listeners, every day we testify how the well prepared and planned propaganda from Tešanj Hate Quarters is delivered against the Serbs, and then equally against all other nationalities in Doboj and the Doboj municipality. It doesn't hesitate to terrify the people and unashamedly lies in a disgusting manner so that these lies stay with the innocent and terrified souls of the people. We have just heard how this crazy war separates not only neighbours but brothers by blood.

We have nothing to add to this, except that in our reporting we will continue to uphold the sacred tradition of journalism: to give the truth and information built on the truth. I can only repeat that which we emphasize often: that journalists reporting from war zones so far haven't enjoyed greater freedom than the one which has been awarded to all of us from the Crisis Headquarters of the defence force of Doboj, and speaking of our radio program, I have to thank all those who are protecting us, honest and respectable soldiers, and also the honourable people of Ozren[36] whom we genuinely admire for their heroism and dignity demonstrated in these difficult days."

Zoran waved his hand and the sound engineer turned off the microphone. A folk song started. During the first days of the war, Radio Doboj played only folk music; the soldiers didn't like popular music.

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While around three thousand locals from Doboj were imprisoned in the jail "Spreča", the concentration camps based in Bare, the military hangar in Usora, and the disco club "at Perčo's", Radio Doboj was silent. The foster-

35 A small town 20 km away from Doboj which accepted around 20.000 refugees, mostly Croat and Muslim ones, fleeing Doboj on 3rd May 1992. This number of refugees was about four times the population of Tešanj at the time

36 The mountain near Doboj from which Serb artillery aimed at targets in Doboj and its surroundings

brother newspaper responsible for ideological propaganda, "Glas komuna"[37] published an article on the 12th of August, 1992, with the headline "There Are No Concentration Camps!"

"The current rumours regarding the existence of various concentration camps in many cities throughout Bosnia and Herzegovina haven't by-passed Doboj. In order to clarify these rumours, we have contacted the responsible authorities in the Serb municipality of Doboj and have received the following response: in the region of the Serb municipality of Doboj there are no concentration camps for Muslims or peoples of other nationalities. In Doboj there is a jail for civilians which is intended for incarcerating peoples who have committed various unlawful or criminal acts. The respective committees of international humanitarian organisations will be able to check and confirm all of these statements."

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"Why are you so pale?" Doctor Štenger asked him.

Permission to leave their homes from 8 to 11 am had drawn many people out of their apartments to search for food, and allowed chance encounters with friends and fellow companions in suffering. Bato, Čeha, Aleksa, Željko, and Mirko exchanged their last cigarettes and anxieties that grew larger daily. "It isn't wise to walk in groups," someone whispered to them. Their friend Salih Begović was caught in the street, beaten up for no reason and taken to prison.

"My dear doctor, that's why I'm pale! There's no way out of this "liberated" city!"

"Don't worry, a small door will open for us too!"

And truly, a small door did open! It was meant for them to be opened! He made it to Germany, and the doctor, who had a talent for medicine, verses, and poetry, made it to the Adriatic Sea. He never forgot that last meeting and his words, and finally, twenty years later, he made it to Baška Voda[38], and in the local cemetery there, searched for the poet's final resting place. They didn't have a chance to meet during their lifetimes again, and now in his search in the cemetery he is assisted by Jozo, the gravedigger. Luckily, he doesn't have to ask him much; he follows the gravedigger's monologue.

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37 Glas komuna – "The Voice of the Community"

38 A tourist town at the Adriatic Coast in Croatia, popular among tourists from Bosnia and Heryegovina, among others

"What's the name of your poet friend? I have a list of all the graves, and if he is here, we will find him in an instant! But first help me, please. I need to shove this corpse into the fridge. They've just brought it in. The poor woman really suffered, she was ill for a long time, she doesn't weigh 40 kilos, however I can't lift even two kilos with my left hand. I was in a car accident, I barely survived."

"Thank you so much! I couldn't do it alone! The funeral will be tomorrow. Let me just ring the bell so that they hear down there in the town that the deceased arrived at the chapel, and then we'll look through my papers for your friend. What did you say he was called? Željko Štenger. From Doboj you say? He was a doctor and wrote poetry?"

I am, my fellow compatriot, from Kiseljak[39]. I was in Bosnia for the duration of the war. It was buzzing around my ears, I could've lost my head a hundred times, and I came down here when everything had calmed down. That's life! You never know where you'll spend the night, or where you'll wake up.

We're different from the people here. Because of money, and because of all those tourists - Czechs and Germans - they don't even have time to attend a funeral anymore. Around ten may come. But if one of our Bosnians dies, the cemetery is packed, hundreds will come. My compatriot, we live in the past. Our dead never die. They're always with us! Look, see how far you've come to find your doctor.

He's not here in Baška Voda. He must be in Bast. There are graves there of the dead from Bratuša and Krvavice[40]. Bast is, as you can see, right under Biokovo[41]. Bare rock, and the nicest cemetery! If the dead could see, everyone would want to be buried in Bast! The view of the blue sea goes all the way to Brač and Hvar[42].

Here he is! I knew he was in Bast! The fourth row, the second grave to the right. You'll find him easily. Drive slowly, the road is very narrow. I'll go down. When I rest, I get my accordion out. That's the only thing I brought with me from Bosnia. Songs and the accordion. *The branch of the pine fell by the sea*[43] Goodbye now! Thank you for helping me! And take care!"

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39 Kiseljak is a small town near Sarajevo, famous for its thermal and mineral water

40 Villages near Baška Voda

41 The mountain above Baška Voda

42 Croatian islands with rich culture and history and popular tourist destinations

43 Traditional Bosnian song - Grana od bora pala kraj mora

He stopped the car by the cemetery gate and in the fourth row rested his hand on the marble tombstone.

"I've come to you, my friend, to have a chat."

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Zahid contributed to the newspaper "Glas Komuna"[44]. He published articles with information and news from his home village of Kotorsko. They knew each other by their faces on the street, and now, in nineteen ninety-two, they are exchanging hellos and whispers. "Keep writing!" he said. "Write everything! Nothing should be forgotten!"

"We'll lose our heads!"

"We've already lost them; we just don't know it yet!"

"Are you writing?"

"I am, every day. I'm writing in my journal. This disgrace should be recorded!"

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From the "Glas komuna", 22nd of July 1992.

"People from Doboj are attacking Doboj from the direction of Tešanj and Maglaj. The Ustaša-Muslim forces from Tešanj and Maglaj[45] have attempted to destroy Doboj; however, for now, the town has only been chipped at, and hopefully it will stay that way. If Doboj stoically endured the shelling from Ustaša-Muslim forces positions, from their ex-positions in Kotorsko and Johovac[46], it is hard to accept the fact that lately Doboj has been attacked by its own Doboj people, hopefully ex-citizens of this town. Namely, there have been several attacks on Doboj from the direction of Tešanj and Maglaj, that is, from territories in these municipalities. It turns out, and this information is very reliable, that many ex-citizens of Doboj have been attacking Doboj; people who had left the town did it because they didn't have the courage to look in the eyes of the respectable citizens who remained here as they knew the things they were planning to do to them and to the town. Even though

44 Engineer Zahid Kremić kept the promise. He wrote a book about war in his city under the title "Doboj 1992 -1995 Grad strave i užasa". His testimony was published in 2023

45 Tešanj is about 20 km North-East from Doboj, and Maglaj is about 25 km South-East from Doboj

46 Villages near Doboj with non-Serb ethnic population

important objects such as hospitals and similar buildings were bombed on the 19th of July, the shells didn't leave any visible traces. There however are deep wounds left in the souls of those who realised that those attacks were carried out by the former citizens of the town."

This news article was signed with the initials N.T.

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He met Drago Martinović on the corner of Celjska and Miloša Kupresa streets.

"I'm going to visit my relatives on the Usora suburb."

"It is dangerous to walk around like this! Take care! Anyone can stop and assault you on the street!"

"Fuck them! I'm not afraid."

They shook hands. His palm was sweaty.

Two days later he learned that he (Drago) had been taken away from his apartment. A lot of time has passed since that day, and then, in 2012, he found an article on the Tipura website, dedicated to re-connecting the people from Doboj who are now living all around the world:

A TWENTY-YEAR SEARCH FOR THE TRUTH

Twenty years have passed since our friend and fellow citizen Drago Martinović disappeared. The war has been over for a long time, but every day, for twenty long years, his family are still waiting for him: his wife Ljubica, daughter Irena and son Igor. For them there is no relief, they're still awaiting - the truth!

All the secrets from the most disgraceful episode in the history of our town were unravelled a long time ago; everyone knows who behaved which way, and who did what; however, it still hasn't been discovered where our good man, the railway worker Drago Martinović, had disappeared.

"We as a family, both immediate and extended family, still somehow live our lives, but there is always that emptiness, what has been left unsaid," says Irena Martinović with melancholy.

"We're still suffering within from not knowing about his end, and from being unable to light a candle on his grave."

Drago Martinović was born in 1948 in Omanjska[47] as the eldest child of mother Janja, maiden name Džido, and father Marijan Martinović,, who was the only brother to his five sisters: Dragica, Slavica, Jozefina, Nada and Zrinka. His parents moved to Doboj in the early 60's and built a house in the Usora suburb of Doboj town. On their worker's wages and hardworking hands, they managed to educate all of their children. Drago completed the technical metal-working high school and passed the professional exam for a carriage inspector, and started working for the railway company. His adolescent days were spent playing sport. He played briefly for "Polet" from Ularice[48], and some ten years later played for the football club "Borac" from Jelah[49]. His youthful and artistic versatility were affirmed by his involvement in music. At the beginning of the 70's, together with Ivica Petrović, he formed the local folk band "Ducats from Doboj", which gained popularity far and wide thanks to his crystal clear voice. He recorded a few gramophone records and audio tapes and became well known and respected in the world of original folk music. He was married in 1975 to Ljubica Krajina and in their happy marriage they had two children, a son Igor and a daughter Irena. They lived in Vladimir Nazor street, above the "Rog[50]" restaurant.

"He was a very social, communicative, and open person, always ready for a joke or to help out," says Drago's daughter Irena. "He had a lot of friends (at least that's how it seemed). He didn't believe it could come to a war, that everything would change, and that people would show some other side of themselves. Even when the war started, he believed the shooting would be over quickly, that only the governing bodies would change and that everyone else would go on living their lives as normal. Not even two days from the last time we saw him did he believe or guess that something bad would happen. There was no reason for it. He wasn't involved in any organisation, wasn't a politician, just an ordinary worker, an unarmed civilian.

In early June 1992, Nikola Jorgić, accompanied by two others, came to our apartment for the first time to talk to my dad. However, as they arrived outside of the curfew time, that is the several hours per day when we were allowed to leave our homes, they didn't find him as he had gone to get bread. It was only Igor and I in the apartment. They came back two days later, on the 11th of June

47 A village near Maglaj, SE from Doboj

48 A village near Doboj

49 A village near Doboj

50 Rog – "The Horn"

1992, and took him to have the "talk" from which he never returned. The search in the next few days, months, and years was in vain and came to nothing. It was as if he had never existed, every trace of him lost.

The so-called friends weren't friends anymore, they feared for themselves, and all of a sudden everything became an "army secret". We heard at least thirty versions of stories about him, and none of them turned out to be true. As much as we tried to get to the root of the truth in the story, we wouldn't learn anything. It turns out they were all made up, or from various retellings became completely different.

Nikola Jorgić, the one who took him away, is one of those who knows my dad's end. Jorgić has been convicted to life in prison, and if he is still alive, is serving his sentence somewhere in Germany. Our "case" is only a drop in the ocean of all the misdeeds committed by Jorgić, which is exactly why he got a life sentence. Despite all that, he denies having anything to do with the event relating to my dad..."

"We did a DNA analysis," Igor Martinović continues. "Every time they discover a new mass grave somewhere in Bosnia, we are alerted by the people from the international committee. We wait with hope, we wait even when there is silence, when we know the DNA analysis hasn't matched. We've been waiting for our dad for years. I wouldn't wish anyone to feel this kind of hope – to hope to find their father's bodily remains, and to bury them with dignity in a grave. I believe my father's goodness deserves to receive goodness in return, for us to be told the truth – where our dad went missing."

From the first day to today, his nearest and dearest went through fear and suffering, hope, sadness, uncertainty, then again hope which replaced the painful desperation for the truth. Where did Drago Martinović go missing? How is it possible for someone to be taken from their apartment for no reason, taken to jail in the middle of the day in the town centre, and to disappear after that? It's true, there was a war going on, but what measures have been taken by the legal governing authorities to find out the truth? Simply, none! The silence is ongoing protection for those who committed crimes, and the nation, whosever it is, for this disgrace deserves to be placed in the dock for trial. Can forgiveness and reconciliation be real when the truth is still concealed?

"Twenty years have passed, there is no place even for hatred anymore," Irena says. "We have learned to forgive so that we could some way or other go back to our normal lives. But after being quiet all this time, we at least

have a right to the truth. This is why we would be really grateful to anyone who is able to help us find out something more about our dad and his fate."

"If our dad were alive today, and if the same war scenario were to happen, I doubt he would flee from his town, from his neighbours and friends," says Igor, convinced. "He would trust them, because mankind came first for him. After this tragedy that has come over us, we have retained his greatness in our memories of him, his belief in people, and in goodness."

"I never saw fear in his eyes, except on that day, 11th of June, which he tried to calm with a sip of rakija[51], disappearing from our sight forever..."

Drago Martinović was not a soldier, wasn't a member of any political party, and there wasn't a single reason to take him to jail, even less for him to disappear without a trace. Do his jail guards have the humanity and bravery to tell Drago's children the truth, even in an anonymous way, so the children can peacefully mourn their father? Twenty years is too long for hope, but it's also too long for sadness, which can't cry enough tears for the absurdity of war, for the innocent civilian lives lost, and for the grievances of children. If anyone knows anything, even the smallest detail that could help us discover the truth regarding the disappearance of the Doboj citizen Drago Martinović, we implore you to contact his family as soon as possible.

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"You should be ashamed!" Niko's moustached face is angry.

He just heard the announcement by major Milovan Stanković, the commander of war operations, on the small wireless radio.

"Unless the citizens of Makljenovac hand over their weapons by 12 noon tomorrow, my units will attack and bomb the village!" Major Stanković threatened. Two days earlier he had uttered the same threat to the people of the village of Prisade and followed it up with grenades and demolishing every house in the village. He intended to do the same with the village of Grapska.

"Where would we get weapons from? What cursed weapons? We don't have any weapons!" the old man helplessly waves his arms in front of the wireless. Those giving out ultimatums can't hear him and are announcing the bombing of his village. And they are even proud of their announcements.

51 A distilled spirit made from fermented fruit

"Never in the history of warfare has a general announced his war operation in advance, as has Major Stanković just done in such a dignified manner!" Zoran Grgurević, the editor in chief of Radio Doboj, points out.

"You should be ashamed of yourselves!" Bearded Niko is desperate.

He went to take his cow out of the stable. The colourful heifer Šarulja is wailing and putting up a resistance by tightening the reins. He is in a panic, where to flee with her? Where to go away from his house? His chest is tight, he wants to cry, but can't. Šarulja feels the anxiety and fear in the air and doesn't want to leave his garden. Her moaning is long and continuous.

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From the "Glas komuna", 20th May 1992 – for the purposes of war propaganda.

"The situation is going back to normal. Due to misinformation and panic many citizens have fled from Doboj, and a lot of refugees from the Bosanski Brod war zone have arrived. Negotiations for handing over weapons and breaking up army units and formations continue...

The war situation in Doboj is going back to normal, and for the purpose of reviving the economy, a large number of work organisations are starting to operate, and an obligation to go to work is ordered. Due to potential fighting in the town and in the surrounding villages, even though the town is completely free and peaceful, movement of civilians is still limited during the day from 8 to 11 am, and the curfew is still in force from 9 pm to 5 am."

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"Will you sign up, or will we come for you?"

That's what he was told by his work colleague from the railway, who had immediately exchanged his blue uniform for the colourful soldier's uniform. He wasn't afraid of guns; his dad was a veteran from the Second World War but luckily had died in time not to witness this war, this disgrace, which had overnight destroyed and spat on the brotherhood and unity of his father's generation's ideals. This wasn't HIS war, but now he had no way out!

It was too late to flee! His wife and two little children slept peacefully in their rooms while he sat alone in the living room of their modest apartment with a half empty bottle. Occasionally he would take a deep breath and breathe out through his pursed lips, trying to blow away with that deep puffing

sound the great anxieties surrounding him. But however much he huffed and puffed, the anxiety grew bigger. That threat wasn't going away.

"Will you sign up, or will we come for you?"

He wasn't afraid. He had arrived in Doboj on Saturday evening, 2nd of May. He had driven the freight train from Zenica. He officially ended his shift and asked the train supervisor when he would be required next.

"Drago, the trains aren't leaving! Nothing is right here! Go to your home, we'll let you know!"

He started walking to his apartment, crossed the footbridge, went over the railway tracks. He stopped only to buy cigarettes. The train station was teeming with people. There were no more passenger trains, but one special train had arrived from Belgrade, full of soldiers in various uniforms. The clinking of weapons was heard on the platforms and the song "Od Topole pa do Ravne Gore, svud su straže đenerala Draže[52]" was blasting.

Some were in olive green, some in colourful, camouflaged uniforms. Some wore traditional Serbian peasant caps, *šajkače*[53] with a cockade[54], some wore caps from the old Yugoslav army, some had the coat of arms bearing two white headed eagles with tinder on their sleeves, some the three-coloured Serbian flag.

He didn't see a single five-pointed red star[55].

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From the newspaper "Glas komuna", 20th May 1992. Serbian Democratic Party, President's Cabinet.

"Dear brothers and sisters, ladies and gentlemen!

I am speaking to you as the president of the Serbian Democratic Party which has been in power since the last elections. However the work of the

52 This song glorifies the convicted war criminal general Draža Mihajlović who was the leader of the Chetnik movement during the Second World War and was also Hitler's ally. He fought against non-Serb civilians as well as the communists or others who resisted the Nazi occupation.

53 These caps were also worn during wars in the past so wearing them implies the military symbol

54 This badge is also a symbol pertaining to participation in the past wars

55 The five-pointed star is the symbol of Tito's partisans' army for liberation of the country from the Nazis as well as from the so-called domestic traitors, *ustaše* and *četnici* who stood by Hitler against the communists during WW2

party has been, let me say, halted due to a war which has reached our territory as well. We have basically united all Serbs into one party, that is frontline for the defence of our country...

Today the Serbian people are suffering through the most difficult days since arriving to the Balkan region. In April of this year, just like in 1941, we have lost our country and our freedom, and now we are faced with the threat of losing our people. Throughout our beautiful country we can hear moans, wailing, and cries. Yesterday's false brother has risen against brother. Once again Serbian blood is spilled without mercy, villagers are being killed on the hearths they had traditionally inhabited for centuries, houses and other public places are being demolished. Hasn't enough Serbian blood been spilled, weren't there enough trials and suffering, pain and tears, destruction, fire; not only that, but yesterday's brothers have risen against brothers?! They want a civil war, something that is most frightening. As if they want the words of our enemies to come true, "that the roads would long for Serbs", but we are letting them know (we cry!) that they will be mistaken. As long as heroic blood flows in Serbian hearts and as long as there is pure Serbian common sense, this won't happen. The Serbian people will find a way... Sacred and honourable and heroic has always been the path of the Serbian people and that is how it will remain. Whoever veers off the path, will be seen as an outcast, as a traitor to their people. Serbian people, don't look left, or right, just look back to your ancestors.

The time to make a decision has arrived. Time to think with one's head, with the Serbian head. The final moment to open your Serbian eyes has come, to see clearly and sharply situations and people, and before everything else, the interests of our people.

Dear brothers and sisters, we raise the heroic flag, the flag for which millions of Serbs happily sacrificed their lives to maintain its honourable and unstained fluttering. Come under this flag of faith and hope, of honour and heroism, the flag which will remove all our sufferings, and all our losses. These words are my oath and my testament to you, Serbian people. Through my words millions speak from the graves, those who sacrificed themselves and fell on battlefields for you, so everything would be better for you. To you who are members of our party and to those who are our supporters I wish lots of success in war, peace, and life."

President Milan. S. Ninković.

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Doctor Azra[56] lost her job. She was made redundant. Dr. Joldić, the director of the hospital, didn't write an official termination letter, but she was told not to come back to work. Her name wasn't desirable in the national nomenclature of the healthcare system in the Republic of Srpska. However, some Muslim doctors had remained as currently there wasn't a replacement for them, but their environment was such as to make them feel different from before, from their old "doctor's status".

Doctor Emina[57] went to visit her relatives in Banja Luka. The ambulance driver offered her the passenger seat, but Ljilja[58] from the administration office was also travelling with them.

"What is she doing here?" she asked.

The driver turned red, and the nurse called to the doctor to sit next to her in the rear part of the car, on the seat next to the patient's bed.

Doctor Joldić had threatened everyone during the meeting: It is war, whoever helps out Muslims will lose their job! Doctor Biljana[59] often visited her school friend and work colleague. The first day she didn't dare to raise her head, she passed under her balcony in silence, with a feeling of shame that followed her from the Old Town all the way to the entrance of the hospital. Doctor Nađa[60] had two little kids. Do they have enough food? Do they have milk? The second day she emptied her pantry and went to work early. She raised her head and looked at the empty balcony.

"They can fire me a hundred times!" She said as she climbed the stairs to the fourth floor. She knocked on the door.

They fell into each other's arms. They cried out loud, while two small children ran around their legs, looking in confusion at their teary mother and dear aunty Bilja.

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56 Inference is on the Muslim female name

57 As above

58 Inference is on the non-Muslim female name. Ljilja can be someone of ethnic Serbian or Croatian background

59 As above

60 Inference is on the Muslim female name

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"Glas komuna" 22nd July, 1992 in an "epic", *ijekavski-ekavski*[61], war-like, stylistic and grammatical nightmare: "The media war in the Doboj war zone has a big role. True information relayed in real time is delivered via Radio Doboj every day for the benefit of the listeners, and the fighters of the Serbian Army in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and non-publishing of the newspaper "Glas komuna" has denied the reading pleasure to many ordinary readers and fighters on the front lines. However, the "Glas komuna" is going to be published and in this edition we are bringing to you a message from Mr. Milenko Gligorić, which listeners of Radio Doboj have already had the opportunity to hear:

"Serbian People!

Following the incredible success we have achieved daily in our fight against the enemy, all that remains is to quickly drive them over the Sava river, to complete liquidation and then our Serbian lands which the enemy wished to claim will be spread with their bones. Is it possible that you, Serbian fighters, are afraid of them? Your steel chests don't fear extreme disasters, nor the angry or blood thirsty enemy. You are the reliable defense wall of the Serbian fatherland against which everything crashes. You will be able to bear temporary, passing troubles, if they appear. A good soldier is defined by their strength and patience; the old warriors will be role models for the younger ones. Let us all remember Karadjorđe, Mišić, Putnik, Vukotić, Mrkonjić, Major Gavrilović, Simić, Martić, Božović, Stanković, and others[62]; they taught us how to tolerate hunger, the cold, and suffering when victory and the glory of the Serbian people was in question. We're moving forward, God is with us, in front of us are the smashed Ustaša and Mudžahedin enemies[63]. Let there be silence, peace, and sacred freedom behind us."

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61 These are two versions of speech/writing with minor differences; "ijekavski" is spoken by Croats, Bosnians and Montenegrins; "ekavski" is spoken by Serbs from Serbia (but not from Bosnia and Herzegovina, unless they want to emphasize their Serbian ethnicity, in which case they inconsistently combine some "ijekavski" and "ekavski" in some words, but usually not according to formal rules)

62 The list of Serbian military leaders glorified as heroes from previous wars against the Ottoman Empire, Bulgaria, Austro-Hungarian Empire, etc.

63 Here, *Ustaša* refers to Croats and *Mudžahedin* refers to Muslims living in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The terms are generally used to define members of military Nazi-supporters from WW2 (Ustaša) or extremist Islamic fighters (Mujahideen) fighting against non-Muslim forces. Here both terms are used in a derogatory manner applying to Bosnian people of non-Serb ethnicity.

***

They escorted our neighbour Sajda[64] from her house. She tried to run. Two bearded men with a fur cap[65] and cockade caught up with her in her garden. Her old legs couldn't take her neither fast, nor far. She fell by the bed of planted onions next to the grown, branched stalks of neatly tied and connected tomatoes. She cried for help, begged for mercy, but help in those bloodshot eyes of her pursuers wouldn't come. The night before at Vila they had been counting their dead for the first time. Thirsty for revenge, they went around all the houses in the Usora suburb and like wolves in a pack searched for a victim. The old woman was easy prey. The large bearded man held the woman by the hair, and in the other hand held a big knife.

Our neighbour Mijo[66], right next door, was on his doorstep. They banged on his door and told him to wait for them. Then they went to the house across the road and escorted Sajda. He saw the flash of the knife, heard her cries and deathly coughing. He jumped over the fence of his neighbouring house and with a bent back, barefoot, hid behind the overgrown thorny hedge and fled towards the ponds. He saw a haystack. He nestled himself deep inside! In the panic his heart was beating like mad, and in his ears the fear could hear their footsteps. He spent the night in the haystack. When he carefully stepped out the next day his neighbours couldn't recognise him; his black hair had turned white overnight.

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Jusuf[67] was a carriage rider, good natured, with some kind of disability from birth; later in life any wrong decisions or actions he would take would be justified by this. He wasn't married. He wasn't poor; he would have been able to support his family with his hands and with the reigns of his horse, but on his way to a woman's heart his sentences were too short and the road was too long. He was drunk more often than sober. He lived with his parents and brother in a large house in the suburb of Usora. Before the war they managed to convince him to sell his horse and to hang up the halter. His brother had set up Zekan[68]'s barn to be a truck repair garage.

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64 Inference is to a Muslim female name

65 Particular fur caps were worn by chetniks during WW2 so wearing this cap is also an ideological symbol of Serb ethnicity

66 Inference to a Croatian male name

67 Inference to a Muslim male name

68 The horse's name

The war caught Jusuf on his feet in a small alley near his house. Three men caught him and started beating him mercilessly.

"We are Serbian heroes! Now tell us, *balija*,[69] who are we!"

"You are idiots!" Jusuf replies.

He fell to the ground from all the beating. The heroes lift him up and ask him again.

"Speak! Who are we?"

"You are idiots!" Jusuf replies persistently.

They are persistent as well. The three men beat him with their arms and legs at the same time and take turns. Jusuf's nose is bleeding and his lip is cut.

"Who are we, *balija*? Speak!"

"You are idiots," moaned Jusuf and stayed where he was, lying on the blood-soaked earth.

From the neighbouring house a neighbour, a Serb, timidly approaches. He points to the now unconscious man and says to the soldiers with an air of trust: "He's not quite right in the head."

***

"Glas komuna", 22nd July 1992 – "A return to living and working routines."

"At the meeting of the Assembly of the Serb Municipality in Doboj many important decisions have been made. The Crisis Headquarters has been recalled, and is being taken over by the War Presidency. Citizens are allowed to move outside between 5 am to 10 pm. Work and hospitality venues are reopening.

Drago Ljubičić, the president of the Serb Municipality of Doboj, spoke about re-opening businesses. He emphasised that upon the ending of the war all business entities must be functioning and it was of the highest importance to return all broken economic channels back to normal.

In the discussion that followed, Pero Bukejlović highlighted three basic elements for reactivating the business activities: a work force, transport, and energy, while Vlado Đurđević pointed out that all those who hadn't responded to the obligatory work call by the 20th of May would lose their jobs.

69 Derogative term used for Bosnians of Islamic faith

Boško Bjeličić spoke about implementing a financial transactions mechanism at the level of the *SDK*[70] and emphasised that the telephone lines should be re-established as soon as possible.

During the meeting there were discussions about current problems in the town, and looting from deserted houses and apartments was one of the biggest problems. For this reason, Boro Paravac, the president of the Crisis Headquarters, announced that any forceful entry into people's homes would be treated as war profiteering, and this would be followed by the most rigorous consequences. For now, according to available statistics, over 600 apartments and 1300 houses have been abandoned. Special committees have been assigned to make an assessment and according to the current information, moving into apartments will be approved, and those who have illegally usurped properties will be evicted."

***

People have fled from the war, and their houses were full of things. First the trucks arrived to collect furniture, fridges, televisions, and then the locals joined in.

Jela went searching with her wheel-barrow. Neighbours hid so they wouldn't run into her on her way back. They were ashamed and couldn't hide their eyes from the overstuffed wheel-barrow. While the elder people hid around the rooms, carefully spying behind the closed curtains, the six-year-old girl remained in the yard.

"Look Ivana what I have!" Jela lifted a plastic doll and held her in her hand. "Now my Boja has a Barbie! Will you play together?"

***

They could hear cries for help on the floor above. The neighbour was a Croat and he had two daughters. Their cries echoed throughout the whole building. All the residents could hear it, but fear kept them locked safely behind their safe doors. Mišo ran out of his apartment bare handed. He worked as a driver for the police. From the beginning of the war he was mobilised into reservist police forces. He was still in uniform; half an hour ago he had finished his shift as a watchman in front of the local radio station. The yelling and

70 Abbreviation SDK stands for the Social Accounting Service, the public service that all business entitites had their transactions recorded and accounted by.

crying interrupted his dinner. His wife, nine-year-old son and eleven-year-old daughter remained at the kitchen table.

"What are you doing there!" He yelled by the entrance to the unruly soldiers.

Through the open door he could see the girls. Their eyes were full of tears, panic, fear, and despair. Their torn up clothes revealed their bodies disfigured with bloody scratches. In the hallway shoes were thrown around, and in the living room the sofa and coffee table were upturned, crockery had fallen out of the small cabinet; it lay smashed all over the floor.

"They are good people! Leave them alone!"

Those were his last words. He fell, decimated by shots from the automatic firearm.

Mišo's honour and bravery in defence of his unprotected neighbours couldn't stop mindless shooting. The truth about his murder was kept secret for a long time. The murderers weren't captured upon committing these crimes and uninterruptedly continued in their war faring activities. The newspaper "Glas komuna" published an obituary, a whole column, on the 5th of August 1992, in which pathos prevailed at the expense of the facts. There wasn't a single mention of the circumstances in which this brave man sacrificed his life. After the war a court case was initiated against one of the villains. He was sentenced to 17 months in prison, which, due to the farcical nature of the legal system, he didn't serve.

The truth about the murder of Miloš Savić, nicknamed Mišo, was consciously allowed to sink into oblivion. In Mišo's hometown they celebrate some other heroes who have formed their careers on nationalism, war, and politics.

He hasn't been forgotten by those who are far away, however! On the anniversary of his death, in 2019, there was a status posted on Facebook:

Vancouver: Celebration of Light

Every summer, around this time of year, pyro technicians who come from all over the world compete from two big boats filled with sand to see whose team will have the greatest fireworks show, synchronized to a thirty-minute musical background. While waiting for the celestial show to start, people start taking their places on the shore from the early afternoon, and onto the

sea every possible boat will set out as well. The media here report that the fireworks are watched by almost half a million people! This year three teams are competing: from India, Canada, and Croatia. After the first competition day, Olja arrived.

We were born in the same town, and for twenty years we have lived in the same town again, yet we meet for the first time! She's a pretty girl with a gentle smile. In her hands she's holding a bottle of wine and a bouquet of flowers.

"You look just like your father!" I tell her after our greeting.

"Thank you, uncle[71] Mirko! I'm proud of my dad. I'm pleased by your words!"

Olivera's dad, Mišo Savić, was murdered in Doboj in June 1992 defending his neighbours. A group of bandits from the Ozren mountain were looting, raping, and assaulting innocent civilians who until that unfortunate year didn't differentiate themselves from others based on their religion or ethnicity. In Sime Lukića street they attacked the Croatian family of Ivica Cigoje. Mišo Savić left his apartment to help and protect his neighbours. The bandits shot at, and murdered, this noble man, a respectable husband and father of two young children.

Doboj has been silent about his bravery and his murder for 27 years. The newspapers don't write about this hero, Mišo Savić, there is no memorial in his honour, they don't mention him at formal celebrations. His act of defending others for the sake of human integrity and cohabitation has been expelled from the war memories of the town.

Greatness and goodness can remain unspoken of, but they must never be forgotten!

In Vancouver, the city that after the war took me and Mišo's daughter Olja, the lights of the Croatian fireworks will decorate the sky on Saturday. I will be on the shore and at least in my mind I will pay tribute to my acquaintance and great man.

Light is always more powerful than gloom and darkness!

And the name of the fireworks identified with my intention: "Celebration of Light"! (A celebration, celebrating the light!)

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71 A usual colloquial form of showing respect when addressing an older man by a child, adolescent, or a person younger than that male. "Uncle" in this sense is not a blood relative.

***

They had lists. They walked up and down the Usora, from house to house and took out terrified people.

They knew exactly where the Croats and Muslims lived.

"You have to come with us," they said when they got to number 49, Radnička Street.

"Why are you taking me? What have I done?" Zdravko asked.

"Don't ask stupid questions! We're just following orders!"

They took him to the truck where there were already around twenty people.

Five-year-old Srđan ran out to his father. With his innocent little hands, he hugged his father's leg.

"Daddy, don't go!" He cried.

"Don't be afraid, son! Go home, your mum will take care of you!"

"Mister, don't take my dad away!" The child was choking on his tears as he spoke to the armed soldiers. With every step the child's request was stronger.

"Please, sir, don't take my dad away!" Choking on sobs, the boy was talking to the armed escort. With each father's heavy step, the child's plea became more and more fervent.

"Please, sir, don't take my dad away!

The soldiers were quiet and looked at the tips of their dirty boots.

The child's mother ran out of the house and with her embrace separated the son from the father.

"Srđan, son, don't worry! Don't cry! Daddy will be back soon!"

The truck disappeared round a curve. The mother and the child were left alone on the road.

***

Neighbours peeked out from behind the curtains. No one dared to go out, let alone stand up for their neighbours.

As soon as the truck swerved round the curve, a yellow *stojadin*[72] carefully left its driveway. The phones weren't working, but Aco Davidović knew where he was going.

72 A popular car assembled in the "Zastava" car factory in Kragujevac, Serbia

"Cvjetko, five minutes ago they took my neighbour Zdravko to a concentration camp!" he said in one breath in front of a door of an apartment in the town. "If you can, please help! And I'm asking you like a brother, you didn't see me! I didn't come to your door!"

Aco, the good man, ran down the stairs. He really wanted to help, but for those in the camp in the Usora there was no help!

***

A similar truck was cruising through Bare that same day, uncovered, collecting people from suburban houses along the highway. Miloš Predojević was in his workshop. Hard working hands always find something to do.

In his garden he heard the clanging of weapons and the heavy footsteps of soldier's boots. They had come for his brother-in-law, a Croat.

"What business do you have here?" He went out to meet them. "There's nothing to worry about in this house!"

"We've come for your brother-in-law. We heard that you are hiding him here!"

"What has my Marinko done to you? He's an honest man! He's not involved in politics, nor is he in any political party."

"He has to come with us!"

"Why? I personally vouch for him. You can't just take people away like that!"

"Dude, you'd better get out of our way! Otherwise, you're getting on this truck too!"

"I won't let you take him!"

They pointed weapons at him. Miloš wasn't afraid.

"Why are you arresting innocent people? Why are you putting to shame the honour and integrity of us honest Serbs?"

"Dude, stop playing smart. Now it's really enough!"

The barrel of the gun threateningly poked his neck under his throat.

"Go, tell your son-in-law to get out. Now you're both going to the concentration camp, together!"

***

Four men sat in the Volkswagen *golf*[73].

Only the driver wore a uniform. Next to him, on the passenger's seat, is his uncle Milan, and the two in the back are fugitives: a Croat and a Muslim. They're depressed and quiet. They're leaving their hometown, and they can feel they won't be coming back. They've suffered, lived through times of fear and hiding in basements and other people's apartments. Ahead of them is a long journey to an unknown address.

The driver Duško is trying to liven up the atmosphere. His uncle is going to Belgrade on some business.

"If we're stopped on the way we have to know what we're going to say," the driver advised his passengers.

"We're workers in a business company. You, Braco, are a supplier, and you Mirko, are in marketing!"

"And I'm the boss!" says uncle Milan.

"For fuck's sake!" the driver swears. "Everyone always wants to be the director!"

"So what will I be then?" asks the uncle.

"Now that you've said it, you can be the boss!"

Upon reaching the first checkpoint in Šešlije, the police patrol pulls them over. The chief officer is Zoran, the owner of a small café in the neighbourhood of Stadion. He drank his last beer on Saturday night on the 2nd of May, and now he is worried if he will be kicked out of the car.

"And where are you speeding off to?" he asks the driver as he watches the two in the back. He knows who they are and doesn't ask for documents.

"To Belgrade! Behind us is a convoy of the company workers!"

"Good luck! And be careful! They're still shooting on the corridor!"

***

There were five or six checkpoints on the way to Sremska Rača, and every time they approached them Duško would accelerate. He explained to them his "tactic".

---

73 One of the most popular cars in the former Yugoslavia

"I worked on a checkpoint. There are all kinds of assholes there. They're unafraid, they provoke, pretending to be warriors! The more they swear and yell, the more important they think they are! And everyone drives fast! So if the guards on the checkpoint see someone speeding without the intention of stopping, all they can do is either shoot at the car or just let the maniac get away with it. And when they hear someone slowing down, they will stop them, because they can tell they are ready to stop."

They weren't stopped until Rača.

"We are the first in a long convoy! There are about twenty trucks behind us!" He is explaining this to the policeman and is waving some papers in his face. The police man is quiet. He doesn't say anything. Duško raises his hand to salute him and accelerates. On the other side, the Serbian police officer asks for identity cards and asks if they have weapons.

"We're the first in a long convoy. We're going to get food. We don't have weapons!"

The border controller, without taking a proper look, hands them back their identity cards.

"Good luck!" he says.

The Volkswagen sped away on the deserted motorway named "Brotherhood and Unity", as if the car itself was escaping the war, passing with ease the kilometres to Belgrade. There is silence again in the car. Everyone is caught up in their own thoughts, their own worries. A metropolis with bright city lights awaits them. There is no war there. People are peacefully strolling on the streets, not hiding in basements, and aren't living in fear of bombs.

***

The "Glas komuna" wrote about the "Legends of the Battlefield" in some of the earliest war editions. Following the large heading "People already remember Joja" is an epic of praise written in long sentences by the author hidden by initials Z.G. "As he, when he saw all the evils awaiting the Serb people, secretly brought weapons and armed Serb houses, he was exiled and misunderstood even by the ones closest to him, those who are nowadays selflessly grateful to him for their saved lives, as are the mothers and sisters from Banija, who, while he protected them near Okučani day and night with his brigade, he was given the name which from then on he proudly calls himself JOJA, named after the famous fighter Joja from Kozara..."

The newspaper included a photograph of him, and the people in Doboj recognised him, not as Joja, but as Nikola Jorgić "Jorga", but this author of war propaganda wouldn't give up on his awkwardly strung sentences and Jorga's new name: "From the first war operations in the Doboj war zone, Joja, as an experienced and fearless warrior, gave it his full contribution. There was almost no combat action, and not a single territory that was liberated without his participation and contribution.

'I am here as a part of the Serb police force and I am fulfilling all the military obligations,' Joja says..."

A week before this panegyric was published, a passer-by met Jorga in the Old Town. He is in his camouflaged army uniform, and on his sleeve is a semicircular emblem sewed on, with big letters in Cyrillic script[74] saying "МИЛИЦИЈА" (Police) on it. Two handguns are on his belt; to the right is the bigger calibre "heckler", and to the left a "Beretta", smaller calibre, 6.35 mm. As soon as people see him, they move away; although some do say 'hi' to him, but he waves them away, intent on patrolling the town. He stops in front of an Opel car, takes out his Beretta and shoots at the tyres.

You can barely hear the gunshot, but from a distance you can see how the car is slowly descending on its rims. Now surely he can't escape! And thieves can't take it either. It can only be towed away under the Gradina!

Jorga continues his walk, patrolling and occasionally taking his little gun out. Deafened by the thunder of grenades and the noise of loud gunshots, town folk don't even notice the barely audible shots.

The next morning the Opel with the punctured tyres wasn't there anymore. It had disappeared overnight! Wherever Jorga had aimed, there was now an empty parking spot.

***

The engineer Jozo Garić was arrested in Dragalovci. They had shoved about twenty people into the truck.

"When the locals hand over their weapons," yelled the officer, "we'll let you out of jail!"

The locals of Dragalovci didn't have weapons, the rotten settlement was part of a plan to scare and "cleanse" the Croatian village. From the jail in Spreča they were taken to the tin barracks of the concentration camp in the

74 Serbs usually used Cyrillic, and Croats and Muslim Latin script.

Usora suburb, and then to Perčo's disco club. The engineer was transferred once more, this time to the concentration camp in Bare. They needed an expert to work the combine harvester.

By pure coincidence they took the engineer Jozo to his old workplace, to the Trudbenik factory which made pneumatic tools. Accompanied by an armed guard, he enters the main hall which instantly brought back memories. The young engineer started his career at the Trudbenik, and right there, in the "Pneumatic Tools Section", he proved himself to be an expert one could depend on. The German company Index Traub from Esslingen sold them two state-of-the-art heavy duty CNC machines with a central control unit. They cost over two million marks! They needed to be included in manufacturing, complete the machine programming, do the test work and train workers to use and prepare the tools for every new position.

All of this is going through Jozo's mind as he is passing through the factory hall. And he remembers Omar, the fitter, and Suad Bajramović who was an engineer, working on processing CNC machines in the Trudbenik, and Mujo Omičević, the Pneumatic Tools Factory Manager, and Stjepan Fararo, Technical Director, and Luka Stanišić, engineer and Head of Plant. With the new machinery they were catching up with the advanced world. Of course, he couldn't forget that. Once they had required 28 minutes for the production of some parts of pneumatic tools, and tool processing was performed on several classic lathes, so the process of obtaining the final version took a whole week. When they implemented the "Index" CNC, for the same object they required less than three minutes!

The engineer Jozo passes through the "Pneumatic Tool Factory" to his not so distant past; to 1986 when workers competed for productivity and quality. His steps eventually take him to reality.

In place of the CNC lathes in the factory plant there was - an empty space! The machines have gone!

"Where are my machines?" He asked aloud and bit his tongue.

He was afraid of the closeness of the armed guard. The soldier was quiet. Before the war he had also been an employee of the Pneumatic Tools Factory. This hole in the factory plant pained him like a tender wound after a tooth extraction. He hesitated and weighed his words.

"They say," he said quietly, "the "freedom of Doboj" has been paid for with these, our machines."

***

Nermin was early. The queues in front of the embassies are kilometres long. Only if he arrives at dawn is there a chance to leave his paperwork to apply for migration. Yesterday he was unsuccessful at the American Embassy, today he will apply at the Canadian Consulate. The bruises under his eyes are still visible, as are the dark circles under an eye.

Seven days ago, he was on the Belgrade - Budapest train. He heard that the Hungarians were still accepting refugees. However, he had no luck. As soon as the train departed, he ran into a bunch of "volunteers" cruising the corridor. He regretted sitting in an empty compartment. The doors shook open without a greeting.

"Identity card!"

They started insulting him as soon as they read his name.

"And where has, I beg, a Turk set off to? You're running away, you creep! We're on the front lines dying, and these bastards are taking out money and running away!"

"I don't have any money."

"What do you mean?! You run across the border, yet you don't have any money? Who are you fucking with? Get the money out!"

He didn't even get a chance to defend himself, he was getting beaten. He covered his face with his hands. He could taste blood on his cut lip.

"Get the money out while your head is still intact!"

He barely got to pull his his wallet out. They took his last 500 marks and continued their march to the next compartment. He got off the train at the first next station. Bloody and cut up, he contacted his cousins in Belgrade.

"What is it cuz, you've already crossed the border?"

"No," he said, holding back tears. "Can you pick me up? I'm waiting for you at the station in Novi Sad."

***

"They haven't let Doctor Muhamed pass!"

"What?"

"As soon as they saw his ID card, they said: "You can pass, but he can't!"

"So where is he now?"

"He stayed at Rača."

"What the fuck! What's going on?! O, this fucking country! What are they doing to innocent people?!"

"I drove him to the hotel. Actually, it's not a real hotel, but some kind of inn where truck drivers go with their hookers. There was no other option! I told him to stay the night there and that I would come back for him tomorrow."

"We have to think of something. We'll write a letter, something like the Crisis Headquarters requested the doctor has to assist in a hospital in Belgrade."

"And where is our stamp? Without the stamp, they won't believe us at the border!"

"Don't worry about the stamp! I know a guy who could forge the United Nations' stamp, let alone some fucking Crisis Headquarters' one. As soon as this is over you have to go back to Rača.

This doctor saved my mother's life, and I can never forget that. Dr. Muhamed is a great man. I'd give an arm for him!"

The next day Duško crossed the bridge close to where the river Drina meets the river Sava, in Sremska Rača.

"My dear doctor, here I am, for the second time! You know that God helps us Serbs three times! If we don't make it now, we'll have one more shot!"

The doctor is pale and exhausted and isn't in the mood for jokes. One can see that he hasn't slept a wink. He sits in the car and they get to the border in no time. They ask for ID's.

"You can go; he can't."

"What do you mean he can't!?"

Duško takes the paper out with the fat stamp on it.

"He's a doctor – a specialist! I'm driving him to assist doctors at *VMA*[75] in Belgrade!"

"He can't cross this border!"

"Listen! I'm telling you nicely, as a man to a man: I am driving this doctor to VMA to assist doctors. My brother is in that hospital and he's wounded! If

75 VMA – Military Medical Academy, a leading institution for medical treatment, education and scientific research in medicine

you don't let the doctor go, and if my brother dies, it'll be your fault! I swear I will find you!

The policeman looks at the paper with the fat stamp.

"Go," he says shortly.

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"Glas komuna" 17Th December 1992

"Stop to deserters! All those who, after the 25th of May 1992 (when mobilisation in Republika Srpska was ordered) left the municipality and went past the borders of Republika Srpska are considered deserters, and sanctions will be imposed against them. Those who left the municipality earlier and went to another republic of the former Yugoslavia will have to pay a monthly tax of 50 Deutsche Marks, retroactively, from the 1st of April of this year. The tax must be paid also by those who are employed abroad and who have so far paid over a million and a half marks for tax to the municipality."

***

Željko moved to Belgrade a long time ago, upon completing university. He started visiting his relatives, refugees from his hometown. They're silent; he's doing all the talking. They have lost everything, but he has secured a good job in the capital city. He works for the police. Once he pulled a long knife from a jacket pocket.

"This is an ustaša trophy," he said. "This trophy is from Vukovar!"

He fingers the top of the bayonet, and then moves down the sharp blade.

With the same hand he caresses the curly locks of a small child, the displaced person's daughter.

The father of the blonde-haired angel is silent.

For the child's safety he doesn't dare to say what he is really thinking.

He quietly smokes away, lighting one cigarette after another.

***

The town was showered by grenades. Completely at random, with no specific target. Wherever they fall they'll kill someone, someone's mother, child, sister. These two had gone out to buy bread. The newspaper had pub-

lished the obituary, two photographs and sad memories, under which was written:

Jelka Aličić, nee Lener, professor – Jasminka Aličić, student.
Died tragically on the 17th of October 1992.

On the occasion of the death of our dearest – our wife and daughter, mother and sister - whose noble souls will live forever in our hearts, we will cherish their kindness, gentleness, and humanity forever and carry that within us as a permanent and unforgettable memory.

Unable to say thank you in another way, we're doing it this way, so for all the help and their expressions of condolences we thank our cousins and neighbours, and especially the following families: Delić, Mišković, Miladinović, Gavrić, Bukvić, Pupić, Cvjetković, Tahirović, Fejzić, Prnjavorac, Mišurić, Bajraktarević, Jović, Božić, Lukić, Marković, Simić, Todorović, Kresoja, Stijović, Mulalić, Mahinagić, Avdić, Mujanović, Kovačević, Bjeličić, Ibrahimović, Gabrilo, Elezović, Šego, Kečalović, Blagojević, Čehić, Stanišić, Kikić, Begović, Šešlija, Kljajić, Puhalo, Stojčinović, and Tešić. We especially thank the "Bosanka" factory collective.

Safet and Jasmin

***

"Mum, I don't want to die!"

"You won't die, my dear daughter!" Her mother Franka consoles her.

Suzana Pranjić Rajkovača is heavily wounded in Sivša.

She was taken to hospital on stretchers. It was a ceasefire that morning, there was no shooting. For days they had hidden in the basement and the bombs and grenades whizzed and boomed for hours.

"Devil take them, how do their canons stay in one piece after all the shooting?" Suzana's father-in-law wondered and advised her carefully, "Daughter-in-law, please take care of yourself! Don't leave the basement!"

Suzana is 21, she's still a child and with child. She's pregnant. She got married just before the start of the war. Her husband was mobilised and sent to the front line of defence of the Usora, meanwhile she stayed with his family.

A summer's day had dawned, a morning bathed in silence. It looked like it was peace. The clear blue sky filled her whole soul. She wanted to help. She went out to feed the livestock and fowls.

The doctor said, "Your daughter has lost a lot of blood and the shrapnel have seriously wounded her internal organs. We can't predict anything – she's in critical condition!"

"Mother, tell me I won't die!"

"You won't, my darling," her mother encourages her. "Everything will be fine, just hold onto my hand."

Ten years later, on the same day, the day of sad remembrance, Franka's second child Miroslav had a baby daughter. He named her - Suzana!

Under Grič

Military strategists carefully chose the front lines to be in the Šumareva kuća – Bandera – Putnik Hill – Buljubašića Glavica – Londža – Vila formation. The defining of these front lines was a continuation of the political decisions made by those in power who were creating the future ethnic divides and borders of the new order in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The art of war was once studied in schools and at Yugoslavian military academies. They had always been "the red ones" and were always under attack by "the blue ones", sometimes from the Western, and sometimes from the Eastern Block, and they had always had to defend themselves (and during the military exercises – always won). However, in 1992, the colours started to mingle and there wasn't an external enemy – they became their own enemy. Now they turned their weapons on each other! They used to all be ONO[76], and now they are this!

"Corps for attack – corps for defence", once an exercise during army training that was intended to bring the young soldiers, and occasionally reserves, in line, now became a painful memory. The excitement that the young boys felt as they left for the army[77], raucous and singing, where as beardless youth they had their first taste of the "school of life" and were to be shaped differently thereafter. Now the JNA[78] gave weapons to one, and turned its back on the other two peoples. Now, the brotherhood, unity and togetherness, that according to the wishes of the final testament of the Leading Commander[79] was meant to be treasured like the pupil of one's eye, was a target within the snipers shooting range on the dividing line between Razbjenjak to Zubak House, over Londža and their school at Vila. The unity from the doctrine of ONO that they

76 Acronym for Opštenarodna odbrana, a subject "National Defense" studied in schools throughout Yugoslavia to prepare every citizen for self-defence in times of war, especially during the cold war period. 'Ono' is also a play on words, literally meaning THAT.

77 Yugoslavia had mandatory army training /conscription/ for men aged 18

78 JNA – Jugoslavenska narodna armija, Yugoslav People's Army

79 Tito

were so proud of, that had funded the lifestyles of officers "from Vardar to Triglav"[80] including free education, free accommodation, and free holidays, popped like a bubble. Half the "corps" was now in attack, half was in defence, but this time with real bullets.

The summer had faced its sorrow. June was turning into July. The year was 1992. Up on Grič, on the hill where there was a small church, the Serb soldiers were on the front lines, and down in the village in no man's land separating two enemy lines the Croat villagers are frantically collecting the harvest, vegetables, hay, feeding livestock which they didn't have time to hide away. They are still naively hoping the war will stop, for who is deranged enough to wish to lose the freedoms and peace they already have? Who is crazy enough to risk getting themselves killed? In the village there aren't many of them left, twenty people at best. Most of the Makljenovac locals have fled far from the gunfire and found safety with their godbrothers, godsisters and friends in the villages on the river Usora.

They can be seen from those above, on Grič. They are wasting days away from boredom, jeering at those collecting hay.

"Don't stack the hay, you'll fall"

"Better hold your pole!" Another man yells, and the third has a sinister laugh. "Hold on to my cock!"

The villagers are quiet. Afraid to say anything. They are unarmed and are just hoping the ones on the hill won't start shooting and that they can finish their work by nightfall. Then they will leave the village and sleep in Ularice, Alibegovci or Sivša, or in someone's basement or outdoor kitchen, where they have gone to sleep every night since the war began. Slowly they are getting used to war and to their dire living conditions. What isn't collected today from their house might not be around tomorrow.

As is usually the case, stupidity attracts misfortune.

Two soldiers, on their own initiative, crossed the front lines. They came into the village hoping to loot the empty houses nearest to the front lines. According to the unwritten law of "being in the wrong place at the wrong time", they were spotted by reconnaissance from HVO[81]. They ran to the basement of Rajkuša's

80 Reference to the whole of Yugoslavia common in songs and poetry, where Vardar, the river in North Macedonia is in the south, and Triglav, the tallest peak in Slovenia, is in the north of Yugoslavia.

81 HVO – Croatian Defense Council

house. Their fellow soldiers were at the top of the hill, about a hundred meters away, and couldn't see them from the bushes and trees, and couldn't help them.

"Surrender!" The reconnaissance officer called.

One of them decided he didn't want to do this, so he ran out of the basement and started shooting. The reconnaissance officer replied with their own fire and the man was fatally shot in the yard.

"Don't shoot!" Begged the other, and crawled out with his hands in the air. He surrendered and survived. As a captive, he was later used as ransom for other captives in war negotiations, for bodies both living and dead.

Was the careless endeavour of the two soldiers, followed by the tragic end of one of them, a reason for the bloodshed that was to follow? No one knows.

A day or two later, a group of soldiers came down from Grič. In members of the Krajina family they found local civilians. They were unarmed and their only crime was that they had been at own their homes at the wrong time.

The men had their wrists tied with wire. The women begged and cried but there was no mercy. It was impossible to tell later on if they were beheaded or lined up to be shot. Their bodies were thrown on a pile and the house was set on fire.

The charred bodies of the retired bricklayer Franjo Krajina and his wife Ivka, the retired Mate Kopčić and his wife Kata, were found in the basement of the burnt house. A similar cruel fate, as insidious revenge for the Battle of Putnik Hill, befell others on the other end of the village, near the stream "Komarice". The murderers killed the old teacher Mara Krajina, her sister Katica, mother Doma and neighbour Anica Krajina for no apparent reason. To hide the crime, they discarded the bodies in an unknown location. Their bodies were never found and the surviving witnesses have kept silent! To this day, those responsible have never been found. The murderers are still walking free.

According to data by IMCP (International Commission on Missing Persons) and the Institute for Missing Persons in Bosnia and Herzegovina that has unified earlier existing agencies, in Doboj there are still 144 missing persons. To this day in the area that used to be the Doboj county there have been five mass graves with about sixty victims exhumed. According to DNA analysis and other forensic methods, a total of 249 victims have been identified.

From 1992 to 1995, around 2316 civilians in the Doboj region have been killed or missing as a direct result of war, and out of that number, 1282 are Serbian, 929 Bosniak, 110 Croat, and five of "other" nationality. These statistics are taken from the allegations issued by courts for war crimes trials before the national and international judicial authorities.

Witness[82]

I wake up in the middle of the night in fear. I need time to come to, to calm down, to realise it was just a dream, that I'm not actually in jail and they won't come from the darkness to beat me up and take me away. I have woken up like this for the past 29 years. I dream of people who aren't with us anymore, who were killed, I dream of the Red Berets[83] taking us away, I see their guns pointed at us, expecting shots to be fired, and then, all sweaty, I wake up and try to shake myself of that nightmare.

The first time they came for me was on the 6th of May 1992. The town was almost completely empty. The town was "liberated", on the radio they said that the "liberators" announced the town was going back to normal, normalising things in "Serbian Doboj". It was far from normal; the mosques were demolished, the Catholic church was half destroyed, and with my own eyes I watched the profiteers loot Muslim households, people who had fled from the town, and had forced captives to assist them by loading the robbed goods onto trucks.

It was morning when unknown soldiers from the Red Berets started kicking down my front door.

"Get out you Muslim pig," they yelled and swore at me.

They took me to SUP[84]. I was interrogated by Branislav Petričević who was a friend from my classroom, from high school. It is a small town, there are no secrets, we all know one another. I was slightly relieved to be interrogated by him; at least it's not some stranger. 'Petri'[85] knows me, at least; I'm not a thief, a nationalist, a lawbreaker, a terrorist, not an enemy to anyone. My school "friend" had been a police inspector even before the war and he

82 see the note at the end of the story

83 Red Berets or Special Operations Unit – the Serb-dominated Yugoslav Army which took part in fighting in Bosnia and Herzegovina

84 SUP – Police department / police station

85 B. Petričević's nickname

seemed genuine and confused. He shrugged his shoulders at me; the Red Berets had taken over, he didn't know what do with the huge number of people who kept getting arrested. He said he couldn't help, couldn't do anything, that I'd have to go to detention. They let me go that night reminding me that I mustn't wander anywhere from home. Where could I have "wandered" in an occupied town where there was a curfew restricting all movement apart from 8 am to 11 am? Soon after my half-brother Zulfo Ćirić[86] joined me. He thought he'd be safer with me than in his own apartment in the town centre.

They came again, the evening of the 9th of June. Soldiers in masked uniforms with the red berets, featuring the four S[87], forced us onto the road in front of our house. They demanded that we lay on the ground next to 17-18 of our neighbours who were also thrown out of their homes onto the street. They then proceeded to beat us with wooden baseball bats. Their violence giving vent to the lowest instincts lasted for about half an hour, when they forced us to get into an arriving bus, into the luggage space within the bus. The bus was empty, nobody was on the seats, and the soldiers' sadism was evident when they forced us to pack into the luggage compartment under the bus like sardines in a tin. They transported us to an ex-Yugoslav National Army hangar near the suburb of Usora, where they lined us up and made us go inside under threat of gunfire. For the whole night we had to stand with three fingers on each hand raised[88], and we were forced to sing songs glorifying Serbia and to publicly degrade the then prime minister of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Alija Izetbegović.

There were three warehouses ("hangars") and all three were full. In each there were from 250 to 300 men. We were divided according to our hometown or village, so I happened to be in the same warehouse as my brother; there were also many familiar faces, mostly from Doboj. In the other two warehouses were people from Čivčije, Grapska, Ševarlije, Potočani, Dragalovci. Living conditions, or more accurately, survival conditions, were awful. In our warehouse there were 280 people and we all shared one container of 15 litres of water. We didn't receive any food until the 18th of June – I remember the day as it is my birthday! We were allowed to go to the toilet only once a day, ten people at a time. The management and safety of the hangar was supervised by reserve police officers. The commanding officer was Zlatan Krekić. How-

86 see the note at the end of the story

87 the four S symbol meaning "only unity saves the Serbs"

88 Serbian symbol, thumb, index and middle finger raised up

ever, they didn't beat us while we were there. Slobodan Karagić-Karaga would visit the jail (our concentration camp) often. He demanded money from the people in the jail, claiming that was the only way for them to save their lives – if anyone offered him any money or gold he promised them they'd be set free. Despite that promise, while I was there, no one was let go.

Sometime around the 20th of June in the concentration camp a huge truck for transportation of furniture arrived bearing the name "Razvitak"[89]. They called 130 names and stuffed us into the truck. We lay stacked like wooden logs, one on top of the other. With no air, we almost suffocated in there. They drove us to a new concentration camp that was newly created in a former disco club "Kod Perče" (at Perčo's) in the Vila suburb.

"Hands at the back of your heads! Back of your heads!" they screamed. "Get out, you animals! Get inside!"

In this camp there were 340 people: 140 people from Doboj, 160 from Čivčije and 40 Croats from Dragalovci, including their local priest[90].

We lay on bare concrete and had a slice of bread to eat daily. The camp was run by the Red Berets and unlike the last place, here we were beaten constantly. The appalling state of affairs we found there and what we actually went through is too hard to describe and those memories haunt me to this day. The rooms were too small for that many captives. We could barely breathe! Every day brought us a new kind of torture. The guards would take people out, beat them without mercy, heartlessly, full of spite and fury. I remember well, after my arrival there they brought Stipe Čičak in who lived in Ćuprijska street. They beat him so hard that he barely gave any signs of being alive. He could hardly breathe and could not even drink a sip of water. He died in this jail two days later. We asked if they could remove his body from the jail cell but the guards ignored us. All of us prisoners were driven off to do forced labour such as digging graves for the dead Muslims and Croats, dead livestock and performing other tasks.

They abused and beat us in many different ways, but it seems they got the most pleasure from taking us out in groups, forcing us to fight amongst ourselves, especially when they were drunk, and they would laugh, cheer, swear and just watch from the sidelines. That's how I got beaten up twice. The Red Berets were the most brutal with their methods of torture and beating, and

89 An Ex-Yugoslav furniture company, also ironically, "razvitak" means "progress"

90 see the note at the end of the story

from the people I recognised amongst them the one who was especially known for his brutality was Zoran from the village Ljeb, who had worked at a tobacconist's stall next to the bus station, before the war. He mercilessly beat Ivica Barukčić and one worker from SDB[89] in Brod, who had a pacemaker.

I remember one interrogation. The weather was nice, summer was coming, the linden tree was fragrant, but we weren't aware of anything. We couldn't appreciate any beauty, our lives were paused because of the disbelief of being in a concentration camp, wondering what we were supposedly guilty of and why our freedom had been taken away from us. I don't remember the exact date - it was the end of June. They put tables in front of the camp and there were seated police inspectors Branislav Petričević, Slobodan Dujković, Milan Savić, Siniša Lopandić. They divided us into groups and we waited our turn for interrogation. I watched Slobodan Dujković, nicknamed Papa, beat my neighbour with a shovel, last name Sekulić, who lived in town. As fate would have it, again I was put into a group that was interrogated by my schoolmate, Branislav Petričević. He lifted his head as he saw me passing the table. I looked him in the eyes seeking in them recognition of our mutual school experiences. Captives in the concentration camp will grab onto anything, any words of hope. He told me that there was talk of some kind of exchange of war captives, but that Muslims wouldn't go to Odžak to be exchanged, just the Croats, so they would let us go. After this interrogation we were escorted back to the camp and a shred of hope that was ignited lasted a few days and then disappeared. There was no hope for us to be let go. I could not have known then that the worst was just to come.

It was the 12th of July 1992. We heard loud and ongoing gunfire, and suspected that something serious was happening. Through the window we could see there was a commotion amongst the guards over something that was happening. I also noticed that two police buses, one personnel carrier vehicle and an anti-aircraft military vehicle arrived soon after. Soldiers with red berets barged into the camp. They demanded 50 volunteers. As no one volunteered, they forced out the ones closest to the door. I found myself amongst those fifty. They forced us into rows of two and to run towards the crossroads at Plane, near the school at Vila. Besides me, that group included Vahid Avdić, Ešef Ahmić and his son Edin, Jasmin Makarević and four brothers from Čivčije. The majority of those taken out from the camp were

91 SDB – National Security Agency

men from the village of Čivčije. When we got to the crossroad, they told us to undress, to take off the top half of our clothing. They then put us into five rows each with ten people. Milutin Blašković was standing with a helmet and an automatic gun next to the personnel carrier vehicle. I knew him. He was one of the leading officers in the police department in Doboj. There was also a soldier in army greens with a red beret and a marked scar on his face. He would often come to the concentration camp and we would call him the Montenegrin because he had that accent when he spoke. I heard clearly how Blašković told the Montenegrin that he got approval from Andrija Bjelošević, Head of the Security Service Centre, to take us out of the concentration camp. Only then did I realise we would be used as a human shield, and because of the commotion amongst the Serb army and police, I realised that the Bosnian army was at Plane and that was the source of the gunfire. It was all happening right ahead of us. In the same formation as before, five rows of men with a space of ten metres between us, we were forced to advance towards the hamlet of Kikići. When we arrived at the front line, the Montenegrin stopped us and told us if anyone tried to move without being ordered to do so, or to run away, they would shoot us all. He approached a young Croat from the village of Dragalovci, named Anto Kalem, and shot him ruthlessly and cold heartedly in the middle of the head.

"This is what will happen to all of you if you don't follow orders," he screamed.

The lifeless body of Anto was left behind on the road.

"I will kill anyone who tries to run away!" he reiterated.

What I had once watched in movies, when the Germans[92] would lead captives away to shoot them, was happening to me now. Except that this wasn't a movie and our killers weren't Germans. They spoke my language! How was it possible that they were taking me, an innocent man, to my death? Why? My legs felt wooden and heavy, as if they weren't my own. My mind was gone. Why? Why am I a victim? For what?

They ordered us to stop near a big concrete wall. There was also a curve on the road and we couldn't see what was happening behind it. They forced the first line of men to walk onto the clearing, then the second line, then the third. The gunfire didn't stop. When it came to the fourth line, it was my group. When we were forced to walk past the curve, I saw most of the men

92 Reference to Nazis in WW2

from the first three groups lying dead on the ground. Then a reserve officer arrived, whose name I don't know, and told the soldiers not to shoot at a house nearby because in it were "his men". At that moment, two men came out of the house and said:

"We are with you! Don't shoot!" I recognised Omer Delić and Salko Makarević[93] but the Serb soldiers also recognised them. The officer close by shot them with a gun and killed them both. Then even more gunfire started. In that heated exchange of fire, a few soldiers were wounded. In that chaos, the men from the concentration camp who were in the last group were ordered to rescue the wounded soldiers, and the remainder of us had to go out again as a live barrier - in three lines with four people in each line. While we were approaching the Bosnian army (we could see them, it was all so close), they yelled at us to run to them and to the free territory. Vahid Avdić and I were the first who managed to jump over the barbed wire near the road, and when the others started to follow, we heard gunfire from three-barrel rifles and the anti-aircraft gun.

Dead bodies started falling on top of Vahid and me. We lay motionless while the Serbs and the Bosnians continued shooting. What was happening within me during that hour or two, I can't faithfully describe. It was late afternoon, maybe 5 pm, but I had lost all track of time and all of my senses were dull, except for the most basic survival instinct. Vahid and I, fearing we would be discovered for being alive, somehow managed to escape under all the dead bodies by crawling to the nearest house we could see. We crawled into the basement. We found a load of coal and covered ourselves with big chunks of coal. When darkness fell, we crawled out of the basement and continued our escape. We had no idea what was going on or where anyone was positioned, where the front line was, where their army was, or where our army was. Unarmed, naked to the waist, we only hoped that it wasn't our time to die. Darkness was our ally. Crawling, in constant fear of being discovered, we continued towards the river Usora.

We crawled all night, slowly and cautiously. Slightly before dawn, we arrived near the river Usora, between the café "Kalipso" and the football pitch. We hid in the banks amongst the willows. When daylight came, we felt unsafe so we went into the water. Between the roots and unsupported branches, we were safer. While waiting for night to make our escape safer, the fish were our

93 the names refer to their Muslim background

company, biting our wounds and scratches. When it was dark again, we continued our crawling and hiding by the river banks. Somewhere upstream it had rained a lot and the water had risen, so there was no crossing. In the daybreak of the second day, we swam and dived through the river. Wet, tired and exhausted, with bloody hands and feet, we somehow made it staggering to Matuzići. We were surprised: the whole place was deserted! For fear of shelling, the whole population had hidden, there wasn't a soul to be seen. It had been a whole month since we had shaved. We were hairy, bearded, torn and bloody and we went like ghouls uphill towards the mosque. Out of nowhere, an old grandma in *dimije*[94] appeared. She had a whole tray of baked pies in her hands. When she saw us, she was horrified and dropped the tray.

"*Četnici*[95]!" she said, terrified.

From some basement nearby people ran out with guns. For a second I thought - our people would kill us.

"Don't shoot! Don't shoot!" we said with our last atom of strength.

Luckily, they put their guns down. After two days of hiding and wandering, we were welcomed by members of the army of Bosnia and Herzegovina. They sent us straight away to the hospital in Tešanj.

I was in the hospital bed in disbelief of what had just happened to me, that I had just lived through the most horrifying war scenario – having been a living, human shield between two warring armies, each consisting of my fellow town folks and classmates I had grown up with, with whom I shared all the best years of our lives in our hometown. In the two months since they proclaimed Doboj "liberated" and started the war, I had lost 15 kg. I was skin and bone lying on the white hospital bed sheets. They had forced me from the concentration camp bare handed and innocent to "protect" with my own body warlords who were fuelled with hatred and nationalism. Thanks to the hospital care, everything in me opened – both the new wounds as well as old memories. Memories of the past hurt, and I was burned by the new, horrifying reality. I lay in hospital for 20 days.

"Cry, you'll feel better" the doctor said.

I couldn't cry. I couldn't even let a tear drop. My soul was crying!

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94 Traditional Bosnian trousers inspired by Ottoman dress, loose fitting like a long skirt

95 Radical Serb nationalists

* Edin – Edo Hadžović is a local from Doboj who was a witness at the International Criminal Tribunal in The Hague and at the Special Department for War Crimes in Sarajevo in a few different legal proceedings pertaining to war crimes, some of which are still being in the process to this day. He said he didn't want to be a protected (anonymous) witness, but would remain himself, using his first and last name, to testify to the horrific and tragic wartime events he himself had witnessed. His testimomy has helped publicly shape the truth of what happened in Doboj in 1992. Hadžović is a survivor and witness of the living human shield used in Makljenovac and because of this is for now bound to silence due to the court proceedings that are still ongoing and doesn't give interviews for the media or the public. He lives in Čakovec in Croatia. This story is a documentary-literary attempt at recreating the horror and fear he experienced, and is based on thorough research of his testimonies, the materials used at the court and also from transcripts from the Adjudicatory Chamber of the International Criminal Tribunal for the formerYugoslavia in The Hague.

* Zulfo Ćirić, director of Bosnaprevoz, a large (pre-war) transport company with 600 employees, was taken from the concentration camp by the Usora river back to the jail in Doboj. Apparently, thanks to someone's intervention, he was released after five or six days. Unfortunately, not long after that, two armed men came for him, took him to the village of Stanovi where he was tortured and murdered. The murder of this innocent man, a respectable citizen of Doboj, started being processed in court after the war but was never completed. Two names of the men have been whispered in secret, that they are from Rudanka, but this war crime has remained unpunished.

* The priest from Dragalovci, Reverend Marko Šalić, innocent and with no charges being made against him, spent two months imprisoned in different jails in Doboj: in the "Spreča" jail; in the concentration camps built in the hangars in the suburb of Usora; and in the ex-disco club "at Perčo's". With the help of the bishop Franjo Komarica and other connections from Banja Luka, he was released and transferred to Croatia. He spent a long time rehabilitating in Opatija, then travelled to Germany, but his health had already deteriorated beyond recovery. He died on the 12th of January 1993 in Doboj from injuries sustained from the torture and abuse. "Lord, bless this crazy world with some sense!" was the last sentence from his journals that are presented in the next chapter of this book in their original form.

* The day when the Red Berets came for the prisoners at the concentration camp at the former disco club, the prisoners could not have known what was

happening in the free territories. After about fifteen thousand civilians were forced to flee Doboj in the direction of Tešanj in the first days of May 1992, and especially after the intense shelling of the villages of Grapska, Prisade and Makljenovac, even those who blindly believed that the Yugoslav National Army[96] would protect them, realised very soon who the aggressor was and that they would have to defend their homes. Soon after, the Doboj district headquarter of territorial defence was formed (with two detachments called "Doboj" and "Bosna"), followed by the 110 brigade of Croatian Defence Council to defend Usora. The front lines were established: the Serb border went from Vila, by Londža to Kikići and further towards Zubci and Buljubašić glavica, and on the left side towards Putnik Hill and further towards Bandera and the Forest Ranger House. The Bosnian-Croatian border was at the very end of Makljenovac from the crossroads at Ularice, along the road towards Prljače and Radošine, to the garage of the old Ekonomija at the Putnik Hill, and then further down towards Duboki potok, Bejići and Sivša. The whole of Makljenovac (the village before the war had two names: Makljenovac gornji, with about 800 residents mostly of Croat nationality, and Makljenovac donji, with about 1135 Bosnian Muslims) was in a "buffer zone" between the two opposing front lines. As the time went on, the exiled Doboj citizens wanted more and more to return home. An action to breach the Serb border was planned in the utmost secret. The Serbian forces were at an enormous advantage with all their weapons and military position and couldn't fathom the idea that they could be attacked by poorly armed exiles or refugees, or other locals of the Usora region. They were taken by complete surprise by the attack that started at 12:30 on the 12th of July, 1992. (According to one version, the attack was supposed to start at 7 am and that information apparently made it to the Serbs so they were ready for the attack. However, due to some logistical reasons, the attack was delayed until noon. As nothing had happened in the morning, the Serb army thought it was a false alarm and as it was St. Peter's Day, the soldiers relaxed after eating and had a nap). The push through the front line was about two or three kilometres. The Croatian Defence Council had control in the line Visoka glavica – Razbjenjak – Porin, while the right wing of the military action led by the "Doboj" squad of the Army of Bosnia and Herzegovina covered the line Putnikovo brdo (the Putnik Hill) – Buljubašića glavica – Zubci – Plane. Some men from that squad eventually opened up a path that led to Plane sometime in the afternoon. The road to the town was opened. There was panic amongst the Serbs and someone had the cowardly and illegal (by international war conventions) idea to use captured civilians as a live shield, walking in front of their own foot soldiers when advancing towards the Bos-

96 Controlled from within Serbia at the time

nian and Croat army. Fully armed, with vehicles full of ammunition and their own weapons, the Serbs forced fifty men, who had been kept at Perčo's, to walk in front of them starting from the school at Vila, across Plane towards the Putnik Hill. Around 3 pm, they arrived with their captives near a great wall on the road towards the mosque on the way to the Putnik Hill, near the house of Huso and Bego Makarević. This area had already been under control of the Army of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The distance between the two front lines was 30-40 metres. The people making up the human shield found themselves in the middle of both gunfires. Having recognised the captive civilians, the soldiers from the Bosnian Army were reluctant to shoot. The conflict that ensued took many lives but most from the human shield. It was one of the most brutal and savage examples of war in the Doboj region. As they were fighting basically chest to chest, both sides ended up mixing within themselves and started fleeing to nearby houses to hide, not knowing who was where or with whom in that chaos. As night was starting to fall, they stayed at their positions, about 10 metres away from each other. They shot each other and threw bombs at random, and at dawn the furthest group of the Bosnian army managed to escape from the front lines on the path by the holiday house of Dr. Matija Tot, house of Mahmut Mešić, up until the houses of Dajaković and Jelić (cafe Kalipso) towards the Proleter children's playground. Croatian Defence Council and the Army of Bosnia and Herzegovina managed to hold the Putnik Hill position for two days but after the Serb counterattack and massive artillery fire, they receded back to their original positions which they secured strongly until the end of the war.

* When the war finished SFOR[97] and other international organisations exhumed bodies found in two mass graves at Plane and identified 28 civilians - captives from Bukovičke Čivčije, Grapska, Dragalovci and Doboj - who had died as a result of being in the human shield. The witness who had survived, Edin Hadžović, was called to assist in identifying the remains. Amongst the massacred captives were three Omerčić brothers, Arif, Hasib, and Mehmed, who died side by side, two brothers - Halid and Meho Mujanović, the well-known accordion player Ramiz Hamidović and his son Safer, the taxi driver Ešef Ahmić and his son Senad.

The conflict had one more tragic story: in just five minutes the three brothers - Jasmin, Sejfudin and Nedžad Makarević - died literally on their front doorstep on the Bosnian side. Their home from which they were exiled they saw for the last time on the 12th of July 1992.

97 SFOR – Stabilization Force in Bosnia and Herzegovina / NATO

In total it is estimated that 32 soldiers from the Bosnian army, 9 from the Croatian army and 34 from the Serbian army died in the battle. On all sides there were about 200 injured.

After the Dayton Agreement was signed, Makljenovac was forcefully divided between the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina on one side and Republika Srpska on another. The village that once cultivated a shared existence now has two different landline numbers, two different sources of electricity supply, two different postal codes, two different water supply lines, and the entity border is where the front line was in the war. In their divided lives, even the name of the battle is different on both sides. On one side it is called the Battle for the Putnik Hill and on the other it is called St. Peter's Day Battle for the Liberation of the Town. Of course, truth and facts are manipulated, each to their own, to suit the narratives. In 2015, next to the road to Vila, a monument was built commemorating the fallen Serb soldiers. The monument was built 20 years after the end of the war with a strange lateness to its arrival. Immediately after the war and many years after it, it was considered shameful to celebrate a battle where the Serbs had used the worst kind of "foul play" in war, to cruelly use and massacre civilian captives in such a way, but then the local authorities, spurred by pressure from radical members of Serb soldier organisations, "gave in" and built a monument, a white, four-metre-long metal cross. On the day of the unveiling of the monument, Dimšo Živanović, a commanding officer in the Serb army in the Doboj battalion and ex-director of the company Razvitak, gave a speech, along with representatives from the radical Serb veterans and other organisations. The local media SRNA[98] that publicised the event continued in the vein of spinning lies and war mongering propaganda, stated that in Doboj on that day, the 12th of July 1992, "from multiple directions the Muslim-Croat forces and other paid foreign soldiers attacked the Serb army". In fact, the only paid fore-igners were the soldiers speaking in dialects from Serbia and Montenegro in the Red Beret and other factions. There was not a single mention of the captive civilians from the concentration camp at Perčo's disco who lost their lives then. The place where they all lost their lives is about 300 metres and there is no monument or mention of them. According to The Dayton Peace Agreement, that part of Makljenovac was assigned to the entity of Republika Srpska and local authorities don't allow any kind of monument to be built to commemorate those lives that were lost in the human shield. Standing before the times of oblivion and falsifications of truth, the golgotha of innocent victims is only resurrected from the memories of the surviving witnesses.

98 Serbian Journalism Agency from Banja Luka

Lord, Bless This Crazy World with Some Sense!

Today, on the 29th of August 1992, I begin to write this, in Opatija. I'm here for rehabilitation after suffering a heart attack and imprisonment in jail and a concentration camp for 62 days. Namely, I am the priest of the Dragalovci parish, and it is about Dragalovci and myself that I am recording in this sad war diary.

Twenty-six days have passed since I was released, and still, when I talk or write about some events, I can't stop myself from crying. Maybe I shouldn't be hard on myself for it.

Until the 3rd of May 1992, in Dragalovci one could sense a pre-war energy. There was an anxiety in the air, an uncertainty about what would happen to us. Cities were falling: Sarajevo, Mostar, Brod, Brčko, Modriča... The tension was growing, and in Dragalovci and Doboj, except for this tension, it was relatively peaceful. Long convoys of soldiers were passing by on their way to their missions in Croatia; here, there were still no incidents.

Three leading parties in the municipal council agreed not to demolish the town. They handed over our town to the occupying forces – the Serb army. And the mutual agreement – didn't work. On the 3rd of May 1992, the occupying forces began their hellish regime. First, they demolished the mosques and lit the church on fire. Then they arrested the more prominent Muslims and Croats and sent them to jails and concentration camps. All of the available premises throughout the town were full of prisoners, and a reign of the terror unheard of began. In Doboj the occupying forces began ethnic cleansing the town of all non-Serb peoples. Houses and businesses of non-Serbs were demolished and burnt down. Everything that could be looted was taken. All this had started long before Dragalovci had its turn.

Apathy is rife in Dragalovci. People are wandering around the village as if they'd never done anything in their lives. The village is populated by Croats, except for four Serb households. We're all living in unbearable fear. We don't expect anything good. During the last few days we have been blocked and we are beginning to realise that something bad is coming. I don't even

have the will to start reading a new book. Any kind of serious work is out of the question. My weak heart suffers even more when listening to the news on the radio.The news on TV has already stopped, and people are frantically trying to use every opportunity to move their wives and children to safety, but it's getting harder and harder. Those who worked in Germany, Austria, Slovenia or Croatia are making most of the opportunity. On Ascension, 28th of May 1992, we're invited to the Crisis Headquarters of Stanari, the Serb village, for an agreement: Ivo Barukčić, the innkeeper, me, the priest, Žarko Bekavac, the president of the local community and two respectable citizens, Ićo Barukčić and Vinko Barukčić. They took us in kindly, but we didn't get to talk much. Everything came down to their assumptions that we were all armed in the village. Thus, the conversation was full of assumptions and threats. We tried in vain to convince them that our village was not armed. We returned home in low spirits and determined to do what was in our power to resist this difficult temptation. On our way back, Ićo said, "I can see that the safest option would be to buy some kind of a machine gun, and then hand it over."

I was thinking the same but didn't say anything.

On Sunday, 31st of May, 1992, at around 4 pm, a truck arrived in our village, full of rowdy and armed soldiers. They were followed by several cars. They went to the train station. I was sitting in my garden and listening to the news. Half an hour hadn't even gone by, and I could see a yellow van waiting for my neighbour Ivo Mandić. In front of his house there are two armed soldiers – and I see that they're taking him away. Headed in the direction of me, and the church, there are some soldiers, armed and ready to shoot. I see what's going on. They ask me, "Are you the parish priest? You must come with us!"

They are at least allowing me to get ready quickly. I take my medicine and tooth brushing kit. It doesn't occur to me that I might need anything else. Pale and mute, already seated in the van, are Ivo Barukčić, the innkeeper, Stjepan Cerina, a young man from Kulaši, and my neighbour Ivo Mandić. I join them. We are silent. We're guarded by armed soldiers. We stop in the village Stanovi. In the local Youth Community Centre, they take us to a dark room. As we would leave the room to go to the toilet, we would see that we were being guarded by armed soldiers. We are being treated quite decently. I slept that evening basically on my feet. In the morning, we were interrogated one by one, mostly about weapons in the village and if we were hiding them in the communal cemetery. We denied the possibility of this. Ivo Barukčić and I

emphasised the fact that we spoke to the community and asked parishioners not to do anything stupid with firearms. Weapons would be of no use to us anyway as we were surrounded by Serb villages. If the main command allowed it, the officer promised to take us back to Dragalovci. However, nothing came out of this. Around 12 pm we found ourselves, all four of us, in the jail in Doboj. We were being interrogated again, this time by plainclothes inspectors. We waited around again, and then around 9:30 pm we found ourselves in jail cell number 3. We were in the same room as eleven other young Muslim men from Grapska. Their journey had been terrifying and they had been in that room for three weeks. Before they arrived there, they had been viciously beaten and tortured. Their village had been burned, and the villagers forcefully deported. No one knows where the women and children went; all the men were in concentration camps. They [the young men] would go out to work every day and come back with news. Unfortunately, nothing they told us was good. The four of us had thus far avoided a beating. We were all collectively terrified of drunk and drugged up gangs who would come in and beat prisoners. Our friends and co-sufferers told us that this happened regularly, every eight days. We said we'd see what would happen in the future. Some would die from these beatings, others would become crippled, and some - the lucky ones - would nurse their wounds.

After a few days, in the evening, we could hear how a group of people were yelling in the jail, "This is Serbia!" and then chanting "Serbia! Serbia!" followed by chetnik songs. After that we could hear painful cries and dull thuds. One of us climbed onto the top bunk of their bed and recognised some people from the Dragalovci village in the group. The beating continued throughout the rooms. We are awaiting our turn in terror. Luckily, this time we were not "visited". Our friends from outside sent coffee to the guards, and this saved us.

In the morning, while washing my face, I could see a bloody, rolled up duvet in the corner of the room. Someone didn't survive the beating. We all pity the unfortunate guy. And we are interrogated again. I am the only one from our room who is questioned. Now the military police is interrogating me. They promise not to mistreat me due to my health (I'd already had a stroke), because of my age (59), and because of my service (priest). Two of my fellow parishioners, and later I heard of the third one, are being harassed in the room next door. I can hear the blows, the cries of pain, and wailing. They bring Ivo Barukčić, my neighbour from Dragalovci, a young man of

18. Terrified, he starts saying that, along with Ivo and Drago Barukčić, I had organised a meeting in the church, and that we agreed on acquiring weapons, and that later we handed the weapons out, and hid them in the communal cemetery. A lesson learned thanks to violence!

I'm silent. They bring Drago. He has been beaten and can barely stand and speaks with difficulty. Drago is unafraid; he bravely testifies and speaks the truth. Ivo is freed for speaking the "truth", and they continue to bash Drago. They have to bring him back to consciousness four times, as he told others later on, so that they couldcontinue to hurt him. Later, in the concentration camp, I found out how Drago fared. It took him almost a month to recover; he had problems with his balance, with his kidneys, and his gut. He was beaten with a metal pole to his head.

Ivica had to show the spot where the arms were buried in the cemetery, but because there were no weapons, according to testimonies of those who would arrive later, he was killed and buried in a hole. At the end of the interrogation, when I was done, the policeman said to me: "So you don't have anything!" He had raided my house that day. I felt somehow more at peace, and stronger because of this. The next few days were calm. Aside from the occasional beating of our friends when they returned from their days' work, nothing much happened. We listened to our "workers" about what they were doing. Mostly it was "clearing" Muslim and Croat houses in Doboj and in the surrounding villages. The occupying forces needed everything.

We were disgusted by the savagery and greed of those who only yesterday were our neighbours. Could people really be like that? After around ten days in jail, I was summoned alone again for another interrogation. This was the third time. Waiting for me is the inspector, the one I've already met, and two young men in the uniform of the military police. They don't ask me a single question about weapons in Dragalovci. This time they are asking me direct questions about my neighbour, who is a Serb, from the village I was born in, called Trn. What do I know about Brano's finances? They punch me and hit me with a police baton. The baton bounces off my head. It hurts, but I don't react. Why is this happening now, and what have I got to do with it?

When I was later freed, my brother told me that during that time he had asked our mutual friend Brano to help my family find me. Brano responded, as a friend and as a humane person, but by doing so put himself, and me, in grave danger. Who could have expected it? As a Serb, he wasn't allowed to take the side of a non-Serb.

On the 16th of June 1992, all the people from Dragalovci, and some prisoners from Doboj, were due for a bath and a shave. In those miserable days it was a kind of healing balm. After that, we were all lined up in the yard. I hear the names of all the other Dragalovci locals who had been imprisoned. I hear the names of other Croats, and a few Muslim names. I can't see anyone because I have to bow my head and look in front of me. We had to keep our arms behind our backs. This was the position ordered for prisoners outside of our rooms, when we were standing and moving. I can feel some kind of hope awakening within, that something could happen. Freedom? We'll see.

They herd us onto a truck meant for transporting furniture. They stuff us in as if we really were furniture, trying to fit as many people as possible. There are around fifty of us, all of us from the yard. No air or light coming in – how will we endure this? Luckily the trip was short. We found ourselves in front of a big garage in a military yard.

We enter the garage. The garage is already full of distressed people. There are many Muslims and a few Croats. We hear terrifying stories. Some haven't eaten for four days. Some have open wounds that are bleeding. No one is cleaning the wounds. We can't help the poor bleeding men as our clothes are dirty, and we don't have a single clean piece of cloth. The room has no windows. One can sense the lack of air and light. There is no water for washing. They say it's a concentration camp. We seat ourselves on the shelves which held the weapons kept for national defense of the former country. This army stole all the weapons and now this room and another one have become a concentration camp. The room is about 90 square meters large, and there are around 250 of us in there. The humidity is torturous, people suffering from heart problems can barely breathe. In the morning, I tried to stand up – and I couldn't, there was no air. Two of my fellow Dragalovci locals had seated themselves under an opening of some kind. They let me sit at their place and I started breathing in fresh air. I felt better. It solved my breathing problem, but I was lying in a thick layer of dust. Luckily for us, we didn't end up staying long. During those six days we ate only three times.

On the 21st of June 1992 there was new hope. We were traveling again, only this time we haven't even washed our faces. The vehicle is a truck covered with tarpaulin. They push and arrange us so that as many people as possible can fit. I wasn't called, and my place is on the truck. Those who were called had left before us. Most of them were from Doboj so we believed they had been released to go home. A short trip and another place – again in Doboj. We

enter, as the first group, into what looks like a disco-bar. At first glance, it is a nice but shabby space. Our good mood didn't last long. The rest arrive from our garage, and from the other one, so now there are around 350 of us. Again, we are shoved into a space with no windows, so there is no natural light, nor fresh air. Again, all of us from Dragalovci gather together, and there were 29 of us just from the jail. We stick together and try to comfort one another. The ex-owner of the bar, Perčo, solved the problem of air quality by putting a large fan in the room – the fan is still working. The trouble starts when the electricity goes out – there is no air or water, and it becomes unbearably difficult. The food is slightly better. This is a concentration camp, too. The jail has taken responsibility for the food so every day we have a quarter of a bread roll with a bit of marmalade. It's a tiny amount, but we can count on it.

In the second garage where the other people were, people were horrifically tortured. Because of this, a few days later, the old man Stipo Čičak, Filip's son, from Doboj, died. We begged the camp guards to help the old man, but it was in vain. They drove the dead old man away after half an hour. The dead body was placed inside a coffin embellished with a neat cross. When I was finally released, I heard how his widow was searching for his body in different institutions in Doboj for days. I suppose they thought that they didn't have to notify relatives of the deaths of their family members, as we were all considered dead anyway. After this instance they softened up a little bit. One day an unknown policeman asked if anyone needed medical assistance. I answered.

In total, around 40 camp prisoners asked for medical assistance. On the 30th of June 1992, we got onto two buses and were driven in front of the jail. Again, we bathed and shaved. We were divided into rooms, around 20 of us per room. Now we would finally have warm food and the "jail order". Our moods began to brighten.

A few of us visited a lovely female doctor the next day. Help wasn't great because they were short of medicine. I must also say a few words about the guards. It's about Serbs who are mostly good. There are only two who stand out for their bloodthirsty antics. They are always ready to beat us, either by themselves, or by inviting others to do it. However, the good ones hugely outnumber them, and so it is bearable. The food in jail is very bad – they have run out of stolen goods from shops in Doboj. Now we only get two meals. Often we don't have electricity so we have to eat bread and marmalade again. For around fifteen days it is calm. The healthier ones from our room go to do work and we get to hear some news. In those fifteen days I felt that Andrija

Mlinar from Doboj might be freed. I ask Andrija, if this happens, to go to the priest in Doboj and to tell him about me, and to ask of him to give me a spare change of clothing. It worked! I got my precious change of clothing, and the priest and my friend Jozo Kudić learned where I was.

Sunday, the 12th of July 1992, St Peter's and St. Paul's Day, according to the old calendar. A new group arrives to the jail tonight. Everyone looks like they've been assaulted. At the entrance to the jail, we can hear yelling and beating. We await our own fate, terrified. The new ones go to their room. Some come to our room, covered in blood, and afraid. They tell us they were arrested in their apartments. I don't know what is going on. Three or four days later, again several new ones come to our detention room. Now there are 38 of us, and the room is intended for 12 people. I barely recognise P. Kalem from Dragalovci among the newcomers. The man is all swollen and purple from the beatings. We hear from them what happened on the 12th of July.

The chetniks were celebrating something and forgot about their duties. The defenders used this opportunity and brought on losses for the Serb army. Then revenge followed. From Perčo's disco-bar they brought out 50 young men to use as a "human shield". Twenty-three returned to the camp. Some youths managed to escape to the side of the defenders. And this was the reason for assaulting the whole camp. D. Barukčić was brutally beaten again, and the innkeeper Ivan Barukčić was beaten almost to death, twice. P. Kalem didn't know at that time that his brother Anto had died in that human shield. He was told that Jozo Čolić had died. We now know that Jozo Čolić is alive. I am sorry for Ante, a quiet and good young man. This is why Muslims and Croats were arrested in their apartments and "done for". And that's why all of us prisoners were given a bloodthirsty beating as well. In our room, I got the worst of it. I don't know why, but my head was a target again. I was hit on the head to the point where I couldn't take it anymore. This time there was a boot involved so the result was a short loss of consciousness. I endured all the attacks again without uttering a sound.

In the last group our room was joined by the nephew of Andrija M – Zvonko. He was also collected from his apartment while his uncle had already been freed. He told me that he strongly believed his wife would help free him. He promised me that when he would be released he would go to Zagreb and tell someone in Kaptol about our terrible jail time.

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99 Kaptol is the old part of Zagreb where the Diocese of The Catholic Church is based.

Zvonko was soon freed, and together with his uncle Andrija, went to Zagreb. They kept their promise, and from then on, the Bishop, as well as my family at home, knew where I was.They were relieved, and I was soon freed. Five or six days before I was released, I was called by an investigator previously unknown to me. But he didn't interrogate me – we just had a conversation. He promised that I wouldn't be assaulted anymore, that I would be going home soon, or be upgraded to a better standard of living in jail. Luckily for me, I was released. I was let go on the 31st of July 1992, after 7 pm. We were only allowed out in Doboj from 8 to 11 am, so I had to sleep over at my jail friend's place, his name is Kemal T. In the morning, I left for Dragalovci. I couldn't even imagine how much it had changed in 62 days. I couldn't afford to buy a bus ticket to Dragalovci with the money I had brought with me to jail. I had to search for my colleague Jozo Kudić, the priest in Doboj. And he also repeated what the guard had said to me. "You can't go to Dragalovci!"

I stayed with my colleague who had already put me on a list for the convoy heading out from Doboj to Croatia. The two of us, four nuns, and one disabled woman waited. After so much misfortune and fear, we got to see a clear, bright day.

On the 3rd of August 1992, we received a visit from the Bishop of Banja Luka, Dr. Franjo Komarica, with two Serbian military policemen. We agreed that they would come again with a vehicle from Caritas. They came on the 5th of August 1992, as they promised, and took us from the parish in Doboj to Banja Luka. We found ourselves in Banja Luka, immersed in the kindly attentiveness and love of the Bishop, nuns, and other colleagues who were in the Ordinate. After fifteen days we recovered well. It wasn't total freedom, but it was incomparable to what we had in Doboj.

All of us who had arrived from Doboj left on the 18th of August 1992 by a Caritas convoy towards Zagreb. We arrived in Zagreb in the middle of the night after travelling for many hours. We were finally free!

As I am writing this, other people from Dragalovci are still in concentration camps. As far as I know, there were around forty men. Those who stayed behind in our parish live in fear and poverty. The church yard looked miserable compared to the days when the grass couldn't even grow for the patter of children's feet. Now it resembles a jungle. No one enters the demolished church. The same is with the Priest's House as if there weren't a single living soul. Now all I hear of the remaining folk in Dragalovci is how they're trying

to get out from a place they had loved so much. That pure love was destroyed by the hatred of enemies.

I have to admit that the Bishop of the Orthodox Church in Banja Luka, his Holiness Jefrem, assisted in my freedom, through his two monks. My friends Krstan Dubravac, a monk from Razboj, and Radomir Maletić, a monk from Štrpci, tried to find me. They are both my friends and their care is dear to me, even though they couldn't find where I was kept in jail. They responded readily to my brother and sister and for that I am thankful from the bottom of my heart.

In this memoir I have used two words interchangeably: jail and concentration camp. I have to say, it was all a concentration camp, only in the jail it was slightly easier to bear than in the garage or the disco-bar. My fellow sufferers, some 350 with whom I shared a fate in those two months, mostly stayed behind. Like me, most of them had nowhere to return. Some found their houses had been burnt down, others were robbed, some had their whole village destroyed, but all of us dreamt of freedom.

Lord, bless this crazy world with some sense!

Notes from the "War in Dragalovci and Doboj 1992",
author Marko Šalić, Priest from Dragalovci

Alongside the jail "Spreča", the Serb civilian and military authorities, towards the end of May and beginning of June, created other concentration camps for the non-Serb population of the Doboj municipality. They were based in the military objects of the ex-army barracks in Doboj, the military warehouse in Bare, the military warehouse in Ševarlije and in the Usora suburb, near the administrative building of the factory "Bosanka", in Vila, and in Perčo's disco-club.

At the court proceedings of the ex-president of Republika Srpska, Radovan Karadžić, before The Hague Tribunal, Milan Ninković appeared as a defense witness. He was the key figure and one of the founders of the SDS (Serb Democratic Party) in Doboj. He used this opportunity to state that the Army of the Republic of Srpska defended civilians and refugees and added that there was a large number of Croats and Muslims living in Doboj, and the ones who "went to the other side" were armed.

"Our stance was that they could stay. There was an obligation to work, they had healthcare, and there weren't any bigger issues," Ninković stated. As a response to Karadžić's question regarding prisoners of war in the duration of the war, Ninković stated that between 40, 000 to 60,000 Serb refugees flooded into Doboj from 12 different municipalities, and, "when the Muslims and Croats were exposed to harassment, the concentration camps were opened so those people would be sent to them."

This is what the masters of spinning lies about opening concentration camps and the unnecessary imprisonment of civilians who were exposed to the most horrific tortures and concentration camp measures made it out to look like – Serbian mercy.

The memoirs from the war by his holiness Marko Šalić were published in the book "The Diocese of Banja Luka in Images and Words from 1881-2006", Ordinary of Banja Luka, 2006, and in the monography of Josip Stenjak "110 Years of the Parish in Doboj, 1896-2006", and in the chapter "Testimonies" under the title "The Terrors of War in Doboj from 1992-1995". Dragalovci was in the Doboj municipality, but according to the church regulations it belonged to the Diocese of Banja Luka. The priest Marko Šalić was born on the 29th of May 1934 in Trn, near Banja Luka. He was the parish priest in Dragalovci from 1988.

Not long after he wrote these notes His Holiness Šalić died on the 12th of January 1993, aged 59, in Germany, while receiving medical treatment for the torture he had endured in the concentration camp. His parish, located on the road from Doboj to Prnjavor, near the train tracks towards Banja Luka –

Doboj, had a population of 1030 ethnic Croats before the war. Today that number has been decimated. There are only thirty Croat families living in Dragalovci today. The houses that burned down in the war, and the church, and the parish building, have all been restored since the war, but life as it was before the war hasn't been restored. The arrests and exchange of prisoners from Dragalovci continued from 1993-1995, and the final exodus was at the end of the war, in September 1995. when after the operation "Oluja" (Storm), the remaining 600-720 Croats from Dragalovci were transferred to Croatia on 12 buses for "safety reasons" to escape mass invasion of Serb refugees running away from Croatia – which was the final act of ethnic cleansing of this peaceful village.

Who Needs My Confession?*

When it would sadden sadness,
Make misfortune unfortunate
And bring to tears the space
Between the sky and the earth?

Who should I tell -
To God and to the heavens,
To mankind,
Or to the future
That I cannot know?
Who should I reveal
The secrets,
Which are well-known?

Am I saying goodbye
To you or to myself,
Am I surrendering
Or forgiving?
I have nothing left
Except to dream
And imagine.

Your Honour, Judge of the Heavens,

My name is Predrag Radulović Pile. (I)

I was born in 1952 and I died young, aged 61, tortured by war, even more by peace. I spent a lot of time in earthly court rooms, and once again I am testifying before you and the heavens the truth, and nothing but the truth. I have sacrificed the safety of my children and family, and risked my own life, for the sake of this truth, but it couldn't be any other way.

The truth was stronger than me and stronger than fear; it will prevail with my honour and stand tall for all time. As a result of this testimony in the name of truth I had to endure ten years of criminal proceedings with the accusation that I was spreading "brotherhood and fraternity in Republika Srpska" and that I was "fettering the fighting spirit of the Serb army".

Your Honour, I give you my testimony of how my truth found its way to the defendant's bench.

At the start of the war I was the leader of a group of operatives who were in charge of the National Security Service in Banja Luka. We used the code names Miloš, Sigma, and Pukovnik[100]. We sent our reports to the upper authorities in the Ministry for Internal Affairs of Republika Srpska, and to the Serbian State Security Service. From April 1992, Banja Luka was occupied by a paramilitary formation that named itself Serb Defence Forces. Around 200 members of that armed unit, backed by the Serb Democratic Party seized control of all the important institutions in the town, set up check points, and were lords of life and death, the source of all fear and trembling for the local civilian non-Serb population. Led by Nenad Stevandić, Nenad Ećim, Slobodan Dubočanin and Zdravko Samardžija, the SDF were made up of local criminals and thugs with a long pedigree in police records. With tacit support and assistance from SDP they usurped the democratically elected officials by putting pressure on the military and civilian leaders to dismiss all the employed Croats and Muslims, and to replace all those in higher positions with those loyal to the current political party, even though those people weren't either professionally or ethically qualified for these positions. Then they began the attacks on all non-Serbs and their property, blowing up their houses and businesses... The red van in which they cruised through the town was a synonym for fear and terror. They would raid, beat people up with baseball

100 Colonel

bats, harass, arrest, steal property from the Croats and Muslims, then threaten them by saying: "What are you waiting for? Why don't you leave?" Amongst their victims were also Serbs who were against their criminal behaviour.

"Sir Radulović, why didn't anyone stop these criminals? Didn't Banja Luka have a police force?"

"Honourable judge, please do not call me "sir". I never belonged to the class of "gentlemen". Even in The Hague I was called "Comrade Radulović". Surely there are comrades in heaven?"

"In heaven there are comrades and sirs, now everyone is equal! In the court of the heavens we don't discuss ideology, just ethical issues, but we call people as they wish to be called. Therefore, comrade Radulović, regarding the last question, how come the criminals took over? Didn't Banja Luka have a police force?"

"The police did have enough resources to stop them; however, due to orders from the top officials nothing was done. Members of the SDF were even incorporated into the official Central Agency for Security in Banja Luka and became a separate unit for specialised work. I protested because of this! I couldn't accept that that scum could wear a police uniform, but my voice was isolated. In one meeting I was even told by Stojan Župljanin, then the manager of the Central Agency for Security, that they were Serb knights!

These freaks, these immoral Serb knights, instead of being arrested, continued to engage in criminal activity, dressed as the police force. This criminal activity was most apparent when it was happening outside of Banja Luka: in Doboj, Kotor Varoš, Prijedor, Sanski Most...

"You mention Doboj. What did these people, as far as you're aware, do in that town?"

"They were sent to Doboj as representatives of the police force, as a specialist separate unit. Their official name was the Ninth Unit for Special Operations. They were led by Ljuban Ećim, and there were around thirty of them... joined by Zdravko Samardžija, the Kojić brothers, Šubara... I don't have enough information to confirm that they were invited by Andrija Bjelošević, the Head of the Central Agency for Security, or by Duško Živković, Head of the National Security Service, or if they were sent via other routes as "back up" in the town, a town that didn't need back up as the Serbs already had full control over it. Anyway, their activity boiled down to torture of the civilian population, looting and robbery. No one could stop them! They

"Who?" I asked. And he told me a name: Borislav Paravac.

The Crisis Headquarters was in the building of The Railway Transport Company, right across the road from the Police Headquartes. I left instantly to find Paravac. I'd known him from before; before the war he was the president of the Executive Board for the Doboj Municipality. I didn't call him "sir" as I rarely address anyone that way.

"What's happening here in Doboj?" I asked him off the bat.

"What's happening? What's the problem?" He replied, pretending not to know anything. It was a theatrical performance.

"Man," I said. "Can't you see crime is rife? Can't you see Croats and Muslims are being driven away by the busload to concentration camps? They're being beaten and tortured!"

"So what?" He replied.

"Man, don't you understand what this is all about?" I said.

He looked at me as if I'd dropped in from space, as if I were carrying on about unimportant matters, trifles...

After my stay in Doboj I wrote a report to the highest officials in the National Security Service where I elaborated on the two political branches within the SDP party in Doboj. One branch was more moderate and had quite a humane, ethical, and rational approach regarding the question of ethnic groups living in the Serb majority areas. Unfortunately, the second, radical branch prevailed. They believed in ethnically pure areas and acted accordingly, not being selective in their methods for achieving their aims. I concluded my report with the words: Murdering civilians in Doboj and Teslić doesn't lend itself favourably to Serbian dignity or to the honour of the Serb army!

"Could you tell us more about this? About the radical Serb option?"

"I'll condense their basic idea into one sentence: the more Serbs the better, and the fewer Croats and Bosniaks, the better! That radical option of the SDP party implied that ethnically cleansing and exiling people would mean a smaller percentage of Croats and Muslims in the overall structure of the population. It was said that this number should be below eight percent, and that is the only scenario in which Serbs would be sure that the others wouldn't cause any problems for them."

"Comrade Radulović, you were involved in the arrest of one criminal group from Doboj, known by the name *Miće*?"

"The armed unit *Miće* was formed at the start of the war in Doboj at the initiative of Milan Ninković, the president of the Municipal Committee of SDP. The name of the group is based on his nickname, "Miće". The group was sent to Teslić as an army-police unit. Nikola Perišić, who was at the head of the Crisis Headquarters in Teslić, sent for the unit on behalf of the Municipal Leadership of Teslić, as "assistance", to help calm the war situation. Unfortunately, they had no idea they were sending them these reckless beasts from Doboj, with no humane or moral scruples. Andrija Bjelošević, Head of the Central Agency for Security in Doboj was summoned for help, and in June 1992 he sent around twenty armed people to Teslić, led by the Red Berets and "a certain Njegoš"[102].

They were already well known for the brutality and "operations" in Doboj. Some members of the group were hardened criminals, well known to the police before the war, while others were active members, or reserve members of the National Security Service. How and why they worked together, one should ask Milovan Stanković, the commander of the war operations in Doboj, and also Duško Živković, the Head of the National Security Service. Most of these "fighters" had crossed the line dividing honour and dishonour, humanity and inhumanity, tarnishing their names forever. For the sake of truth, I have to say that there were a number of youths among the *Miće* gang. I'm assuming that they believed they were joining an elite unit of the Serb army, not grasping the fact that they had become accomplices of shame and evil. The *Miće* and other similar formations will remain the darkest stain in the history of the Serbian people. They defiled, satanized, and tainted everything that the Serbs had built as a people for centuries: humanity, and humanity towards the less able and vulnerable.

The *Miće* stormed into a meeting at the Crisis Headquarters in Teslić, slapped everyone present in the face, introduced a curfew, and proceeded to terorize the town to such unprecedented degree, never before seen in this area. The basements of the former socio-political organisations were turned into jails. A list was made in the police station, and respectable citizens of

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102 Njegoslav Kušić Njegoš, the instructor of the Red Berets, on the payroll of the Serbian State Security Service, was sent to a camp in Ozren, then to Doboj, then to Teslić. As a police officer from Serbia, he continued his war faring in 1993 in Bratunac and then on the Tara river, then in 1992 in Petrova Gora in Croatia.

Croat or Bosniak descent began getting arrested. The *Miće* arrested and took away the freedom of around 500 persons without a valid warrant. The prisoners were harassed, beaten, blackmailed. Whoever had enough money could buy their life... The well-known carpenter from Teslić, Jozo Martinović, offered 10,000 Deutsche Marks for ransom, but to bloodthirsty criminals, led by Miroslav Pijunović Piko, it wasn't deemed enough so they continued to torture him, breaking his arm. In the end his wife and sister managed to collect an extra 20,000 Deutsche Marks to pay for his freedom. Rudi Tibitanc had to donate his new car – "Passat" - and 7,000 DM, and the shopkeeper Ramo Jeterić had to give all of the goods from his shop - cigarettes, coffee, and alcohol, along with his "Seiko" watch from his wrist.

The worst was yet to come. The prisoners suffered vengeance and tragedy on the 18th of June 1992 after a "cleansing operation" of the Bosniak village in Ranković, a few kilometres away from Teslić. A reserve police officer had died that day, and another member of the *Miće* gang had been wounded. Enraged and furious, the *Miće* stormed into the jail and started getting revenge by beating the civilians with wooden poles, metal poles, police batons and electric cables. Eight people lost their lives that night. The epilogue of the bloody pyre was that the remaining 18 inmates were shot and killed so as not to be witnesses of the crimes committed in the jail. The location of the group execution was a forest in Klupe, on the mountain Borje, near the road Teslić-Banja Luka. That night, ten more inmates from the jail in Pribinić were also executed. There is a mass grave in the village of Vlajići where ten prisoners from the jail in Teslić were buried. **(See note II)**

The *Miće* stayed for around twenty days after these murders, continuing with their terrorising, beating and looting of Croats and Bosniaks, but also of undesirable Serbs, including raping Serb women whose husbands were on the front lines.

"You, as a native born in Teslić, found out what happened in your town and demanded that the crimes stop?"

"A group of operatives with me as their head had sources informing us of what was happening in Teslić. Unfortunately, it took us almost 30 days to collect evidence. Teslić was under the authority of the Centre for National Security in Doboj, which affected the late response of the security team from Banja Luka. I told my seniors in the commanding hierarchy everything. In the meantime I contacted Nikola Perišić, the then Mayor of the Teslić Municipality. He was the one who had asked for "help" from Doboj, and now he

asked for assistance to rid the town of these monsters and thieves from Doboj. I organised a secret meeting attended by Stojan Župljanin, the Head of the Services for National Security in Banja Luka, Nedeljko Kesić, the Head of the Centre for Public Security, Dr. Vito Popović, Colonel Milan Stevilović, Branko Perić, a prosecutor in Teslić, Nenad Kovačević, the Head of the Municipal Court in Teslić, Nikola Perišić, Mayor of the Municipality, and Stevan Marković, the Head of the Police Headquarters in Banja Luka. The decision was made to immediately stop these crimes in Teslić and to arrest the *Miće*. As I was from Teslić and had experience fighting terrorist organisations, it was decided for me to lead this operation. Colonel Stevilović, a very respectable man and capable officer, (a few months later Serb criminals killed him) insisted on this especially, and he supplied the manpower, as well as the material and technical equipment we would need for a successful implementation of this operation. I decided to enlist members of a unit of the army police of the First Krajina Corps, a few agents from the Services for National Security: Milenko Savić from Prnjavor, and my assistants Goran Šainović and Miladin Stjepanović. That day, Stojan Župljanin appointed me as the temporary head of the Public Security Service in Teslić."

"Could you tell us how the operation went?"

"It would be impossible to tell you all the details. I'll give you a brief description, sticking to the bare facts. Before we went to do the task, I sent a reconnaissance group to check the situation on the road to Teslić and to establish contact with our collaborators, who were supposed to accept us and to assist us in arresting the villains. The reconnaissance group notified me that the *Miće* had been joined by ten more men from Doboj, as well as being joined by an unknown number of volunteers and supporters from Teslić. The back up from Doboj was led by Slobodan Karagić Karaga, whose mother was a Muslim, and father a Serb. The reconnaissance group also notified me that the *Miće* already held positions on the road towards Banja Luka, in the village Pribinić, and on part of the road Čečava – Teslić. The only safe route was through Rastuša which we took to arrive to our destination, the factory *Demos* in Teslić, where we settled and quickly made our plan of action. I'm sorry I can't name everyone who replied to our summons for assistance, but I can't leave out Colonel Dragan Jocić, Captain Veselin Medojević, Captain Novo Škrebić, Miodrag Jovičić Micko, Ranko Đukarić, my own brother Nenad Radulović – all of them were responsible for the quick and successful completion of the arrest.

We started the operation at five am, coming from several different directions towards the place where the *Miće* were nestled. Everything was well synchronised and organised; however, there were, unfortunately, two casualties: one on each side. I can't forget the death of the soldier Aleksandar Ključanin who was shot just a few meters away from me. He probably couldn't even dream he could be killed by a Serb. If it is any comfort to his family he died bravely and honourably, saving the lives of his fellow citizens. On the other side, Siniša Gostić, who had arrived with Karaga from Doboj as back up for the *Miće* was killed. Most of the gang were arrested in the hotel *Kardial* where they put up a fierce resistance. Later on, we found more than 1200 bullet shells around the hotel! We were very lucky not to have had more casualties. The operation was well prepared; we knew where they were going and where to find them. The others were arrested in the apartments of their mistresses.

"What did you find in the rooms that were being used by the *Miće*?"

"It is difficult to list everything that we found and seized from individuals. We found a kilo and a half of gold jewellery, 800 grams of silver, around a hundred new TV's, that many VCR's, ten coffee machines, a great number of bicycles, washing machines, and other household appliances. Aside from that we found 300 new leather jackets, 58,640 crystal glasses, various clothing items, as well as weapons. When we arrested Milan Savić, we found 50,000 Deutsche Marks. We also established that before our arrival they had stolen and driven off 150 luxury cars and many other expensive objects. The value of the stolen goods was estimated at a few million Deutsche Marks.

However, the most terrifying of all were the scenes in the rooms where they tortured their victims. That can't be described or conjured in the imagination. Those scenes chill to the bone and, as a solemn warning to all who have dark goals and desires before humanity, can't be forgotten. During our raids and searches we found a list with 148 names of people from Teslić, all of different ethnic and political backgrounds – 'undesirable' individuals. Our operation was just in time to prevent even more bloodshed in Teslić."

"Comrade Radulović, what happened to *Miće* gang members after the arrests?"

"All of them were set free! To our great embarrassment, they all avoided punishment and were freed from prison! We arrested them all, and then different pressures started coming. The army circles demanded we let them

go (as they were considered members of the army units). Major Milovan Stanković threatened to bomb Teslić from Ozren, to flatten the town if the arrested were not released. I told him that maybe in Doboj he was considered a legend, but that I didn't think he was any different from the *Miće*. I was also threatened personally by Mirko Slavuljica, the Head of the Central Agency for Security in Doboj. His son was a member of the *Miće*, and the warrant gave a detailed account of what his son had been doing in Teslić. As far as I was concerned, the *Miće* were a criminal gang, organised solely for the profit and gain for themselves and others. These others were their superiors!

One should ask Colonel Dejan Bilanović why he didn't stand up to the *Miće*. He commanded the Teslić brigade of the army of Republika Srpska. The brigade had 6,000 soldiers. Had he wanted, he could have easily stopped and prevented the crimes that the *Miće* committed. I always insist that he carries the primary responsibility for everything that happened in Teslić. He would've had to be strong and brave to stand up to them. He even refused to join us when we were arresting them. Isn't it a bit suspicious?"

"Could you describe to us what really happened during those arrests?"

"As a commander of a special unit I did my job conscientiously. It was up to the competent judicial authorities to prosecute the crimes. Milan Savić, deputy president of the Centre for Security Services was arrested, and released straight away. Captain Ljubiša Petričević, a senior officer from the Doboj garrison, who was apparently here because of mobilisation, was taken to the army jail, and then released. They also immediately released Slobodan Karagić, Zoran Tadić, and Predrag Subotić, as, apparently, they hadn't been in Teslić at the time of the crimes but found themselves there at the time of arrest; they had arrived as back up for the *Miće*. A public prosecutor in Teslić filed a request to conduct legal investigation against nine persons who were army personnel and seven belonging to the police force. The investigative prosecutor accepted the request for the investigation and the process was adhered to according to all regulations and laws. To avoid anyone from the Doboj leadership involving themselves in this case, I ordered for all the prisoners to be taken to the jail in Banja Luka. They reacted angrily from Doboj, claiming that our decision was illegitimate as Teslić was under the jurisdiction of the Doboj judiciary. Goran Nešković, the president of the Higher Court in Doboj, wrote to the president of the Higher Court in Banja Luka and demanded the prisoners were immediately transferred to the Doboj jail. They even sent a bus from Doboj to Banja Luka, and then someone from a

higher political, police, or judiciary level allowed this transfer. As soon as the prisoners arrived back to Doboj they were celebrated and received like 'heroes', and were immediately set free, however, those who tried to prosecute them – suffered. Nenad Kovačević was forced to formally resign due to his involvement in the arrest of the *Miće*, and Branko Perić was made redundant from his position as public prosecutor. **(See note III)**

Soon after, the criminal case "disappeared" from Teslić, and later, under mysterious circumstances, presumably from the Ministry of Justice in Pale, it reached The Hague Tribunal. This whole situation was, and will be, the darkest stain of our conscience, brought about by leadership influenced by private interests, completely disregarding the integrity, righteousness, and respectability of the Serbian people." **(Note IV)**

"Comrade Radulović, as an informant you have visited many places. Did you ever encounter any problems because of your findings and reports on the 200 civilians murdered at the Koričanske Stijene near Skender Vakuf (today renamed Kneževo), or the unlawful arrests and tortures in the concentration camps in Manjača, Keraterm, Gradiška, Omarska, Trnopolje, or the murders in Prijedor, Kozarac, Ljubija, Sanski Most, Doboj, Teslić?"

"It's true. I encountered many problems during my service. In Serbia I was considered an agent of Republika Srpska, an extreme communist and even more extreme pacifist, and in Republika Srpska I was seen as a pro-Serb official, a sympathiser of Milošević, an acquaintance of Miro Marković, and what not. But I was always one and the same – a normal man and a patriot who fights against evil, regardless of the ethnic background of the evil ones. Crime is a universal evil that affects everyone, regardless of their national or political affiliations. Personal gain is no justification for any kind of crime. It is the duty of every nation, whose compatriots have committed a crime, to investigate and punish those criminals. Without this catharsis there can be no progress. This is a precondition for living in peace, to be next to one another and live with one another. If man has a sliver of pride, integrity, respect, and bravery, he mustn't be silent in face of that which he doesn't approve. Yes, I am one of such people. I wasn't alone and I wasn't lonely; there were many of us who drew a clear line between patriotism and nationalism, and an even clearer line between patriotism and fascism.

Yes, I had many problems during my service. After 25 years of working professionally in the state and national security agencies, I was fired from my job in 1994. I left behind 2750 pages of documentation, which my intelligence

team had collected on atrocities in all the aforementioned places and elsewhere. I received countless threats from many sides, and they never stopped coming. There were several attempts to threaten my life. Two criminal proceedings were initiated against me. One of them stated that I 'buried the fighting moral of the Republika Srpska Army by spreading brotherhood and unity on the territory of Republika Srpska, specifically by freeing Muslims and Croats from concentration camps and prisons'. As an aggravated circumstance, the lawsuit against me stated that 'when saying goodbye to them I had kissed them goodbye and wished them all the best'. When one experiences this, he cannot help but be astonished how far hatred and revenge can go. Is it possible that as a people we have allowed ourselves to become victims of a relatively small group of individuals, who gave themselves the right to self-proclaim as Serbian warriors, knights, heroes, and volunteers, when actually they were and always will be scum, criminals, and war profiteers?

I hope that, despite all these court proceedings, accusations and threats, the distortions of facts and all these fabrications, my name will remain clean and untarnished.

(I) Predrag Radulović nicknamed Pile was born on the 13th of September 1952 in Vrućica near Teslić. He bore his nickname from childhood due to his love for the namesake football player Pile of the football club *Proleter* from Teslić who was the son of the local baker Rešid. He completed the gymnasium high school in his town and then studied law in Belgrade. He was the inspector for the Agency for National Security in Doboj, and during the war he was the head of the newly formed Agency for National Security of Republika Srpska in Banja Luka. He was a witness during the trials of Mićo Stanišić and Stojan Župljanin, police officials from Banja Luka, who were brought to the International Criminal Tribunal in The Hague to be tried for war crimes committed in former Yugoslavia, as well as being processed by the justice system of Bosnia and Herzegovina for war crimes. His testimony helped to de-mystify many of the murky events that happened during the war, especially events that occurred in 1992. After being let go from his position he worked as a lawyer. Tortured by the war, by persecution, and post-war issues, he didn't live to have a happy, nor long life. After he suffered a stroke he was in a coma for 138 days. He was transferred from Banja Luka to Gradiška for palliative care. The doctors couldn't believe how long he struggled for his life. He died on the 13th of July in 2013. He was buried in the family tomb in Teslić without a priest, but with music and eulogies, surrounded by his close family and many friends, many from Teslić who came to say a final goodbye. He died young, aged 61.

This chronicle-like prose places Predrag Radulović in an imaginary courtroom dialogue and is based on facts, real events that he testified to as a witness in The Hague Tribunals which have been recorded and are available to the public on the internet, on thousands of pages of transcripts from the courtroom. During the testimonies in The Hague he requested not to be called Mister or Sir, but Comrade, which this prose recreates. This testimony is also based on an interview given in September 1999 to the newspaper "Independent Newspapers" from Banja Luka.

(II) "The Independent Newspaper" from Banja Luka published a series of chronicles about the crimes committed in Teslić, Prijedor, Skender Vakuf, and Banja Luka. The editor of the newspaper was Željko Kopanja. Because he wrote about the darkest parts of the war, and after many death threats, a bomb was planted under Kopanja's car in October 1999. Doctors fought long and hard to save his life. He was considered clinically dead, but he survived, although he had to have both legs amputated. This brave journalist continued to write from his wheelchair. He died in 2016, before the perpetrators of the assassination attempt on him were discovered. Under his leadership, shortly before the assassination attempt, the investigative team of the "Independent

Newspaper", in September 1999, published testimonies of witnesses regarding events in Teslić during the war:

"Witness N: Two men in uniforms (later on I learned they were called Raka and Bata) came to see me. They seized my car, a one-year-old Volkswagen Passat CL. They didn't give me any kind of written confirmation about the seizure of the car. Thirty minutes later, these two men came back and took my other car, a Volkswagen Golf, along with 60 litres of petrol and 50 litres of oil. They kept returning after that and took many things. From my restaurant they took 250 litres of spirits, including 40 bottles of whiskey. Dobrivoje Ćulibrk drove my "Passat" around Doboj, and the "Golf" was driven by Milan Savić, the deputy chief of the police. Later I heard that the "Golf" had been stolen...

Witness M: I remember, on the 3rd of June, around 6 pm, ten men from Teslić wearing police uniforms turned up in front of my house. They said they had a search warrant. They were looking for weapons. When they finished their search, they said I had to come with them to the police station to give a statement. They took me to a room already full of people. Then, a man named Piko entered the room and hit me a few times with a baton. Ten minutes later, Piko took me to another room and said that they would release me if I gave 10,000 Deutsche Marks for the Army of Republika Srpska. We went back to my house together and he told my wife to bring 10,000 DM in return for my release. When my wife brought the money, he showed it to me and said the money had saved my life. However, he didn't let me go. Instead, I was summoned by the policeman on duty who asked me to write a letter to my wife and ask for another 10,000 DM, and that only then would I be released. My wife brought that as well, but they still didn't let me go. They transferred me to the jail which was located in the building for Territorial Defence. There they beat me with a wooden bat and broke my arm. Piko arrived and took me to hospital, telling me that I could buy my freedom for another 20,000 DM. I asked my wife to procure that money any way she could. When I was due to leave the hospital, Piko drove me home, and my wife gave him 14,500 DM, 3,000 Swiss Francs, and 16,000 Austrian Schillings. He left me at home and said I had bought back my life.

Witness R: When they drove me, they left me in the waiting room. There Piko hit me in the face, then others arrived and started beating me with their arms and legs. I couldn't see their faces, because I was forced to face the wall and lean on it with three fingers while they were attacking me... Later on, Piko arrived and said I should offer money to assist the Serb Army. I offered

5,000 DM, but he said that wasn't enough. Then I offered 7,000 DM and said that was all I had. He accepted and let me go, telling me to bring the money tomorrow at 9 am. The next day I gave him 7,000 DM. He didn't give me any kind of written confirmation. Instead, he told me not to tell anyone about this incident.

Witness T: They took me to a room that already held around 60 people. That night they started with the orders. A person would appear at the door and yell "Stand up!" Then we all had to lean against the wall with three fingers and sing patriotic Serb songs. He told us which songs to sing.

Witness S: The chief of police and one of the "Miće" gang, a small man with dark, curly hair, told me that there were dead people in the room and that they needed to be buried. I did it, along with three policemen. I'd rather not mention any names. We used a yellow truck. We drove off with eight corpses. I didn't recognise them. This happened around 2 am. The bodies were buried in the place where sand used to be extracted, in Vlajići.

The Accused P: Our immediate authority was Šljuka, but I considered captain Petričević to be our real leader. One morning in front of the local bar in Pribinić the lieutenant colonel Bilanović and the police sergeant Ranko told us to go towards Borja, where they showed us where to dig. I thought we were building an underground shelter. I came back and, following their orders, I took on the personnel from the working unit of captain Jotanović. When the digging was complete, I realised we may have been digging a grave. We were told to stay there until midnight. Captain Petričević told me to take the truck and drive myself to the police station in Teslić. I went there escorted by the army police. We picked up a few inmates from the police station. I don't know how many; I was sitting in the cabin of the truck while the police loaded them on. We drove to the place where we had dug the hole. Following the soldier's orders, we unloaded the truck and forced the prisoners to lie down on the ground. The execution followed. I shot a few rounds from my handgun, but I don't know if I shot anyone... Later, I went to pick up a second group from Pribinić. A smaller group was taken from that jail and what followed was identical to what happened to the first group.

The Accused K: I went to Teslić with a group as part of the escort team to pick up 18 prisoners. We loaded them onto the truck and drove them towards Borja where they were executed. The commander of this operation was Sergeant Dragan Marjanović, because our Sergeant Šljuka was away, and Marjanović replaced him. After that we took 10 prisoners from the jail in Pribinić... Everyone in attendance shot rounds and it wasn't clear who was

shooting whom... I am an ordinary soldier, and I can't say if there was a written order for this. I acted like a soldier, and I don't understand why I am guilty, I had to follow orders.

The Accused Z: On one occasion, sergeant Ranko Šljuka told us that the prisoners would be executed according to the orders of Lieutenant Colonel Bilanović. This was done the same day, at around 11 pm, and the operation was led by Sergeant Dragan Marjanović... We loaded the beaten and half dead people onto the truck. I can't remember exactly how many of them there were. After we unloaded them from the truck they lay on the ground, and Marjanović ordered us to shoot. We shot from handguns... I don't feel responsible, I'm an ordinary soldier and I had to follow orders."

(III) Branko Perić was at that time a public prosecutor in Teslić. He later testified at proceedings in The Hague, expressing his doubts that the *Miće* were sent as assistance in the mobilization which was being carried out by Captain Ljubiša Petričević: "They claimed they were invited to keep order with the mobilization. I didn't find any problems there, or at least I couldn't see them, so I can only conclude that they came with a goal to fear monger and to put some kind of pressure on Bosniaks and Croats to leave "voluntarily". At the end of the day, two operations of so-called cleansing of their villages actually realized this idea. I conclude this based on what happened. The crimes of the *Miće* were tolerated for quite a long time, for more than 20 days, and conflict occurred only when Nikola Perišić found himself in danger of being arrested. I even heard rumours of his assassination. I think their arrests happened as a direct consequence of this conflict."

(IV) Many lives that were awaiting their fate in the dark jails of Teslić, along with those who found themselves on the "undesirables" list awaiting execution, were saved thanks to Predrag Radulović. In the courtroom in The Hague Tribunal, Pile referred to a Jewish quote: "Whoever saves one life, it is as if they saved all of humanity!" He didn't count the Croats and Bosniaks he managed to get out from the cities and concentration camps in Krajina. He didn't save humanity itself, but he upheld humane values. He saved his own people from collective blame for the crimes. Undoubtedly, Predrag Radulović Pile was very brave! A man in the wrong time and place, with the wrong nickname ("Pile" means "chicken")!

The crown witness didn't live long enough to see the judicial epilogue of the process to which he contributed and testified. Twenty-two years too late, at the beginning of September 2014, the members of the Agency for Investigation and Security (SIPA), on a warrant from the Prosecutor's Office of

Bosnia and Herzegovina, arrested 13 persons suspected of war crimes committed against Croats and Bosniaks in the regions of Doboj and Teslić in 1992. Among them were police officials and members of the paramilitary group the *Miće*. From the Prosecutor's Office in Bosnia and Herzegovina came the news that they had arrested Andrija Bjelošević, the ex-Head of the Central Agency for Public Security in Doboj, Milan Savić, the assistant to the Head of Central Agency for Security Doboj, Dušan Kuzmanović, the former Chief of the Police in Teslić, Predrag Markočević, the ex-police commander in Teslić, Marinko Đukić, ex-Chief of the Criminology Department in Teslić, Miroslav Pijunović, member of the reserve police force of Central Agency for Security Doboj, and the following members of the "*Miće*": Dobrivoj Ćulibrk, Dragan Marjanović, Dario Slavuljica, Saša Gavranović, Predrag Subotić, Vitomir Dević and Zoran Šljuka. The Prosecutor's Office stated that the arrested were suspected of crimes against humanity, foremost for the murder of at least 40 persons, forced exiles, unlawful arrests of more than a hundred people, arson, and looting of property. In the report of the Prosecutor's Office the *Miće* had been formed under the patronage of the then leaders of the SDP (political party) in Doboj, and members of that group are suspected of having committed numerous murders in the wider region, from Derventa, Doboj, Modriča and Teslić in the summer of 1992.

The Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina only partially accepted the allegations from the Prosecutor's Office and after a lengthy procedure in July 2018, it sentenced five former soldiers of the Army of Republika Srpska to a total of 82 years in jail for their participation in the murders of civilians on the mountain of Borja near Teslić. "Dragan Marjanović, Saša Gavranović, Vitomir Dević and Zoran Šljuka were sentenced to 17 years of jail time each, while Dragomir Kezunović was sentenced to 14 years. Marjanović, Gavranović, Dević, Šljuka and Kezunović were, as co-perpetrators, pronounced guilty of murdering 28 civilians who were imprisoned in the jail in Teslić and Pribinić on the night of the 17th and 18th of June 1992 on the mountain of Borja. According to the verdict, Marjanović was the commander of the unit of the Army Police of the Teslić Brigade within the Army of Republika Srpska, and all the others were members of that unit and members of the military formation *Miće*. They were found guilty of crimes against humanity, and the judicial panel explained that it was found beyond any doubt that Gavranović, Dević, and Šljuka committed the crime by shooting at and killing civilians, while it wasn't confirmed that Kezunović shot at anyone, but he was nearby and "contributed to the murders of 28 civilians". Marjanović had been, according to the verdict, aware of the command given by the senior authority to kill civilians, and he had, amongst

other things, organised the members of the Army police, and later had given the order to bury the bodies in a pre-dug hole.

Vesna Jesenković, the chairwoman judge, stated that the Council arrived at this conclusion based on the testimony of Dario Slavuljica and other witnesses, as well as on the statements given by Marjanović, Gavranović and Kezunović, who all testified in their own favour. In 2016, Slavuljica, who had been sentenced in this case, was given a reduced sentence of eight years by the Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina after accepting the plea for admitting guilt.

In July 2015 another sentence was handed out to a former member of the *Miće*. The District Court of Doboj had sentenced Miroslav Pijunović, nicknamed Piko, to four and a half years in prison for war crimes committed against the civilian population in Teslić.

The murderers found themselves behind bars, however their superiors, those who supported them and ordered them, are still to this day, free. How long must the grieving wait until justice is served?

Upon exhuming and identifying the bodies, those closest to them finally came to the truth, and could mourn and bury the deceased. Saliha Šaćirović from Teslić lost three sons and her husband, Hanka Pašić lost her son Sedad, Sadika Botić lost her husband Fehim, Senija Salkičević lost her son Nihad, Mato Medović lost his son Miro... In the mass grave in the village Vlajići the bodily remains of Rasim Galijašević were also identified; he was the former Mayor of the municipality of Teslić. He had been a pensioner when he was taken away by the *Miće* to be executed. Thirty-eight lives from Teslić, Ranković, and Stenjak fit into two graves, while others are still being searched for. Relatives aren't losing hope of discovering where they are, and of giving their dead a proper burial in a community graveyard or family grave.

There is a separate judicial process for the instigators and inspirers of the war crimes committed in Doboj and Teslić, which at the moment of writing this book, late 2021, hasn't been brought to a close. Those to be found on the defendant's bench are Milan Ninković, Borislav Paravac, Andrija Bjelošević and Milan Savić. Ninković was the president of SDP and a member of the Crisis Headquarters of the Serb Municipality in Doboj, Paravac was the president of the Crisis Headquarters of the Serb Municipality in Doboj, Bjelošević was Head of the Agency for Security in Doboj and a member of the Crisis Headquarters, and Savić was Deputy Head of the Central Agency for Security.

Justice is slow, but is it attainable?

* Predrag Radulović Pile wrote poetry. He was, one could say, an accomplished poet. He published six volumes of poetry, and this one from 1996 contains 64 poems in rhyming couplets, all of them concerned with universal, humane, and anti-war themes. They are dedicated to his father Đorđe who was awarded the Partisan Veteran Award in recognition of his participation in the anti-fascist war for liberation, since 1941. Aside from writing poetry, he was also an active painter. The cover of his book is illustrated with a flowing blue-white-red flag of the Former Yugoslavia. Under the five-pointed red star, in large Cyrillic letters, the title of the book states: "Who Needs My Confession?"

A reviewer of the book, Vlado Kecman, made an undisputable claim about the author: "He was bigger than the time he lived in and remained a great man when it was objectively hardest to remain so."

Predrag Radulović has left a clean and untarnished legacy behind him, volumes of books and – the truth.

This isn't anything new

It has always been this way;
Good deeds were glorified
And the bad were swept away.

I'm afraid that for a long time
We won't find a better date;
Unlike many others,
I won't let lies abate.

We always blame someone else
Closer, or further away,
One day we'll have to admit
That our crimes, the worst, will stay.

Enough lies from this side,

That side,

Other side.

The fault is with us that we deride.

Evil is within us,

From time immemorial

And while we keep choosing to hate more than love,

The cure is immaterial.

That Day

That day was when the "martićevci"[103] arrived. Twilight was falling and they weren't about to waste time. They went about their looting as quickly as possible. In residential buildings, the names of the residents that were written on the entrance doors had already been changed. The old residents had to change the names written in the Latin script to Cyrillic. Those who had forcefully moved into homes which had been evacuated by former residents had crudely written (in Cyrillic) "*Serbian Fighter*" to avoid any confusion.

Five of them entered the building. The sleeves of their army camouflage bore the sign "SAO KRAJINA"[104]. Their dishevelled appearance and messy uniforms revealed that they weren't true soldiers; they stank of rakija[105] and of not having washed for many days.

They went straight towards them, to the first floor. The door gave them away! The pride of the stubborn husband didn't allow him to change the family name written on his door, which was obviously Muslim, even though his wife had tried to dissuade him. She gave up in the end, thinking that everyone in town knew she was a Serb anyway. She hoped that if anything, her background would save them from trouble!

In her parents' home the children weren't raised in a nationalist spirit; rather they were taught to appreciate people based on their personal values such as their good deeds and good nature. When she had told her parents she was going to be married to her future husband, a Muslim, even though they knew his background all they said to her was,

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103 "martićevci" were members of the so-called "special unit" of "regular police forces". The name is derived from the name of Milan Martić, the Minister of Internal Affairs of the self-proclaimed Serbian Autonomous Region (SAO Krajina) in Croatia. These paramilitary units were involved in murders, deportation and forceful removal of Croatian or Muslim civilians during the war in Croatia between 1991-1995 and in Bosnia and Herzegovina between 1992-1995

104 The self-proclaimed Serbian Autonomous Region (SAO) in Croatia during 1991-1995

105 Alcoholic spirit made of different types of fruits, locally produced and popular in the Balkans. It can be very strong (above 40 ABV) and consumed with or without food

"Dear daughter, you choose your own happiness, and we will always unconditionally support and love you!"

They had lived, for God's sake, in a town where no one had actually cared or judged someone by their name. Most of her friends were in "mixed" marriages. That was once the ultimate goal and symbol of "fraternity and unity"[106]. Now, with the drunk "martićevci" on their doorstep, that symbolism could be very disadvantageous. Luckily they had sent their daughter out in time.

There was no electricity, they didn't ring the bell, they were just banging the door so hard she thought it would fall in.

"Identity cards!" the biggest among them demanded.

"Nusret! A Turk!" he added condescendingly as he read the name.

He flung the identity card over his shoulder into a corner of the room.

"Slavica! And what are you?" He asked as he looked at my[107] identity card.

"I'm a Serb," I said, trying to stay calm.

"What kind of a Serb are you if you live with a *balija*[108]*?"* he said as he grinned at me.

"You're not a Serb! You're a degenerate," said another one of the gang, a thin man with a scar on his face.

"Degenerate, do you have any money to atone for your sins?"

"What kind of sins? I am a respectable woman."

"You may have been respectable. Now you're a degenerate!" laughed one of them. "There are five of us; forgiveness for your sins will cost you 500 marks!"

"Give us the money!" screamed the one resembling a bearded ogre.

"And how would we have any money?! We don't have any money!"

"Tie him up first!" the bearded ogre demanded.

Her husband couldn't fight back; he was slammed to the ground and they started beating him. They were beating him with their arms and legs, wherever

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106 One of the ideological mottos of the former Yugoslav Communist Party utilised to keep peace and tolerance of people of different religious but similar cultural or linguistic background within Yugoslav borders

107 The narrator now switches from the third person to the first person intentionally

108 A derogatory term for Muslims or Bosniaks in Bosnia and Herzegovina

they could get at him. He was moaning helplessly, while I screamed hysterically, calling for help. One of the gang members hit me in the face with all of his strength and I fell to the ground. I fell by my husband. They were tying his legs and arms up. Blood poured from his nose and split lip.

"Bitch!" cried the withered one and he dragged me up by the hair.

I screamed from the pain, and from the hopelessness and desperation.

"Take your clothes off! Now your balija can watch how men from Krajina fuck!"

"Please don't!" I begged. "Have mercy!"

"Shut up, bitch. Otherwise I will properly shut you up!"

Two grabbed me by the hands and shoulders and forced me down. They lifted my husband and leaned him against the wall so he could watch. He was crying. I cried from the physical pain, and also from such shame and insult I had never experienced in my life.

I was later ashamed of my body, as if it were its fault for the smell of their filth and sweat. I couldn't gather the strength or bravery to report the rape to the police. They would question me as if it were my own fault, and wouldn't end up doing anything about it anyway. I was afraid people would find out about it and start whispering behind my back and pointing at me in the town. For days I didn't leave our apartment. We brought a heavy dresser into the hallway and put it in front of the door. I was terrified with the thought that they would come back. I was in shock, numb and disoriented. I didn't know what to do.

"If I'm pregnant, I'll kill myself!" I thought.

It took me a long time to get rid of panic and fear, to even come close to lessening the trauma which would never leave me while I am alive.

That day my whole life was turned upside down.

According to statistics from the United Nations, around 20,000 to 50,000 people were sexually abused or raped during the war in 1992-1995 in Bosnia and Herzegovina, including men, women, and children. Despite the unimaginable horror that they survived, for fear of being judged, ostracised or "shamed" victims would rarely actually report the crimes. According to statistics from various organisations and responsible government bodies, there are only 5000 to 6000 registered cases of sexual assault.

The victims of sexual assault were in most cases women, belonging to all three ethnic groups. The proportionately largest number of registered war crimes were committed by Bosnian Serbs and the Serb paramilitary groups that used rape as a means of inflicting terror and "ethnic cleansing". Rape as a means of ethnic cleansing, as we can see in the example of Bosnia and Herzegovina, has been given the attribute of the most perverted aspect of humanity.

For the first time in the history of international war proceedings, the International War Tribunal in The Hague, The Netherlands, classified sexual assault - that of men, women and children, both boys and girls - as a war crime. More than thirty war criminals have been tried for this crime before the court in The Hague. Predrag Kujundžić and Slobodan Karagić were tried before the court of Bosnia and Herzegovina for the rape of a minor girl in Doboj.

Unfortunately, most perpetrators have evaded punishment and live peacefully in the very places where they committed the crimes. With the wealth they accumulated during the war, and in the post war transition period, they are now living as "business men".

Grapska[109]

When they surrounded our village with tanks and artillery, they were called the Yugoslav National Army. The day they started targeting Grapska, they changed their name to the Army of Republic of Srpska of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The decorative names didn't alter the course of Ramiza's tragic accident. That day Ramiza D. had been in the wrong place at the wrong time!

She had come back to her home village, Grapska, at the end of April to care for her three children, but the dark forces, the ones that are invisible to the naked eye and that one can't influence, were more powerful than her love. She thought she would be safer with her parents. In Bukovačke Čivčije, where her husband was from and where she had a house, a son, and two daughters, soldiers were arriving daily. The front lines extended to the neighbouring Johovac and she thought that maybe it would be safer for the children to be taken to their grandparents.

She walked to the Bosna river and called for the raftsman to take them to the other side.

"My dear child," her parents had said. "It isn't good here either! We're surrounded from all sides, but what happens to us will happen to you too! We'll always find some bread for our grandchildren!"

Every day was more uncertain and more ominous. Then they found out that the raft had been sunk. Now they couldn't go back! Fear was spreading like wildfire, unstoppable and growing all the time.

"Take only the basics," someone informed them from the neighbourhood. "Go down to the road! They are evacuating all women and children to Lukavica."

Their flight was stopped in its tracks at Bušletić. The army wouldn't allow them to pass and they had to go back. The next day, the locals from Grapska

109 A village near Doboj

returned this gesture by blocking the roads to their village. This was the beginning of the end!

The next day Grapska was pelted with shells.

Everyone was cramped in basements, and outside the sky was on fire. The shells hit and demolished every house, one by one. For four whole hours they shook from fear and the bombardment, and then the firing started slowing down. Suddenly it was quiet. The unreal silence was broken by the neighbour Meho as he ran down to the basement.

"There they are! They're coming into the village! Run! Run down the river!"

The old parents wept. "Go, children! May Allah protect you! We can't run!"

The four of them, the mother and her three children, ran out of the basement and by the river banks. She held the youngest child, a baby of 13 months, while her 15-year-old daughter Edisa and son Denis ran in panic fear by her side. It was Denis' eleventh birthday five days ago, an occasion they didn't get a chance to celebrate that year. A small embankment and a hollowed-out stream bed hid them from the eyes of the attackers. They fled as if they were soulless, however much their legs would carry them. They didn't make it very far. They were discovered and shot at. First the eldest child fell.

"Mamaaaaa!" she cried with pain.

The mother stopped to hold her wounded child. She saw the soldiers from the corner of her eye and the smoke billowing from the guns.

"Nooo!" She cried as loudly as she could, from the bottom of her lungs, as if her throat would stop the bullets.

Her son Denis fell next to his sister and stayed motionless as he was shot in the back.

Eleven-year-old Denis Delić was one of 34 civilians who died after the assault on Grapska on the 10th of May, 1992. Grapska was the only village with a majority Bosniak population situated by the old road between Doboj and Modriča. It is surrounded by four villages with Serb majority population: Kostajnica, Pranjkovci, Tovira and Bušletić. The neighbourly relationships were good until the rise of nationalism and the start of the war in 1992.

According to the book "Storytelling on Grapska" by Faruk Hadžić and Muhamed Buljubašić, the villager of Grapska saw their neighbours collecting arms from the Yugoslav People's Army's depots and "sought to arm themselves as well, for fear of their existence and their lives, to be able to defend themselves". At the beginning of May, via Radio Doboj, there was a public announcement regarding negotiations for handing over weapons. The negotiations were led three times, and unfortunately were unsuccessful. The villagers were ultimately required to unconditionally surrender all weapons without being given any solid guarantees for their safety. Due to this state of affairs, they attempted to evacuate the whole population towards Lukavica. However, in Bušletić, the army of Republic of Srpska didn't allow them to pass. When the people from Grapska returned, the army of Republic of Srpska immediately blocked the pass through Grapska in retaliation for the blocking of roads in Bušletić. The traffic towards Doboj, as well as towards Bušletić, Osječani and Kožuhe was halted. That was the beginning of the end and an immediate excuse for the Serb forces to attack, which started on the 10th of May 1992, with artillery fire from seven different positions. That day, according to instructions from the Army Headquarters in Belgrade, the units of the Yugoslav People's Army based on the territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina renamed themselves the Army of Republic of Srpska of Bosnia and Herzegovina. During the four hours of non-selective bombing of Grapska over 3000 different projectiles of varying types and calibres fell on the village. Around 4 pm that day from the direction of Kostajnica, an armored-mechanized unit of the ex-Yugoslav People's Army, aided by infantry, broke the barriers created by the ordinary citizens using their infantry or personal weaponry. Hidden by the darkness of the night, around seventy or so armed civilians managed to escape the surrounded village and make it towards Lukavica, Johovac and Kotorsko.

The locals of Grapska who didn't have weapons surrendered that evening and the Serb army led them towards Kostajnica. The next day they separated 400 men and imprisoned them in a concentration camp in Bare, and 35-40 of them were imprisoned in the "Spreča" jail in Doboj. The women and children were forced to flee in the direction of Svjetliča. The next day 450 women and older people were deported towards Klokotnica.

During that time, Radio Doboj, while announcing the bombing and seizing of the village led by Major Milovan Stanković, reported propaganda claiming that they had discovered underground bunkers and trenches, and various instruments of torture, such as bathtubs full of hydrochloric acid, and so on, intended for Serbs and only the "perfectly timed action of the Serb Army stopped the evils planned by Alija's[110] fighters".

The triage of the captured locals from Grapska who were herded in the army facilities in Bare lasted for about 10 days. The minors, the old, and physically weak were separated and 226 others were taken to Stara Gradiška. Those war detainees would endure all the evils of endless torture throughout the entirety of the war, such as starvation and beatings, with the accusation of, amongst other things, "raping Serb children" in Grapska. Then they were moved to Manjača, then Batković and in the end to the concentration camp Kula[111] near Sarajevo where they were forced to dig trenches on the front lines, and where many of them got killed. Of those imprisoned in the Doboj jail Spreča, ten were taken from their cells on the 24th of May 1992, never to be seen or heard of again.

"After the attack on Grapska and the occupation of the village, there were 34 dead bodies found. According to the testimonies of those who buried them, there were women and children amongst the murdered bodies. Some died from the grenade blasts during the artillery strikes while others were killed during fighting."

Around forty locals who either didn't want to, or were too old to flee, were the only remaining inhabitants of the destroyed village. They were imprisoned and used as labourers for burying dead bodies, collecting livestock, removing and loading furniture and other household appliances during the looting of the place. Some managed to escape however; a month later the remaining 25 were shot in rapid fire in the centre of the village.

"On the 13th of June, 1992, in the early hours of the morning they came to the parking lot in front of the "Grapska" inn that was on the communication route towards Modriča, terrified by the gunshots they could hear. After half an hour of shooting, the infamous Nikola Jorgić, nicknamed Jorga, arrived in front of the inn, with another armed person. Mirsad Hadžić, who had been observing it from the window of the house next door, in his eye witness account says:

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110 Alija Izetbegović, president of the presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina during the 1992-1995 war and in the post-war period until 2000.

111 All three infamous war camps held by the Bosnian Serbs

"The jeep was in front of the inn where Nikola Jorgić, together with his accomplice, stepped out of the car, where he then started shooting in non-stop rapid fire at the group of people huddled in front of the inn. On that occasion, they killed 25 people, amongst them eight women, one child, three persons with mental disabilities, five heavily disabled persons, two of whom were unable to move. The teacher Ibrahim Hurtić, known as Brajko, was also amongst the murdered, along with his wife Ferzeta and their son Admir, who was a minor. Adem Muratović, a man with a disability who didn't have both his legs, and his wife Mevla, also Alema Alić, a paraplegic old woman, were all killed. The rest were also old and helpless."

After the massive crime committed by Nikola Jorgić, along with his accomplice, he ordered Mirsad Hadžić, along with two other men who were also imprisoned in camps, to take the bodies of the murdered locals of Grapska to a hole dug on the field by the stream". (This quote is taken from the scientific study published by the Sarajevo University Institute for Investigation of Crimes Against Humanity and International Law.)

The evidence of this crime was hidden later, and it is presupposed that the bodies were thrown from the primary improvised grave into the river Bosna. The bodies of the killed people have not been found to this day.

After the war, the locals of Grapska who had fled to neighbouring Bosniak villages decided to go back to their homes. Their return was obstructed by the neighbouring Serbs; however, thanks to day and night protection by the SFOR[112] units, they managed to come home at the end of 1999, seven years after their exile. They found a horrific and grim nothingness in their village. All the houses had been bombed and destroyed, all the material goods taken and looted. The poles for electricity were taken, even the pipes for the sewage! The renewal was long and difficult, but life has returned to this place.

Before the war Grapska had 2297 inhabitants, and according to the latest census it has 1415 inhabitants, which is a remarkably inspiring and optimistic number, given the horrors the locals went through. Things may not go back to the way they used to be, but human perseverance doesn't stop. Of the 850 destroyed houses, 600 have been rebuilt up to these days.

Grapska has become a symbol of renewal and return of the people to their hearths in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Life goes on.

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112 SFOR – Stabilization Force, a NATO-led multinational peacekeeping force deployed to Bosnia and Herzegovina after the Dayton Peace Agreement signed in November 1995 which ended the war

Initials

Samir Kadrić loved the rock band *Indeksi.* He adored the guitarist Slobodan "Bodo" Kovačević. He was a music lover, who played a bit of guitar, but mainly collected records, rented loudspeakers, and dealt with mixers and sound systems. He lived in a "military" building, the one near the the Yugoslav National Army Building, in which all the residents had some sort of connection to the army. His father worked in the barracks, a "civilian in service to the YNA". Samir had inherited his father's apartment, where he lived with his wife Vera, and entertained thoughts of his life in the music world. This is where the beginning of the war in 1992 found him.

Milenko G. entertained thoughts of himself in the world of journalism, radio, and television, but he struggled in the first year of his studies as a student at the Faculty of Political Sciences. He wasted another year of his studies while trying to get a hold of a microphone. Only later, at the railway, while studying and working, would he receive a diploma from a vocational school in Rijeka that "produced" the vocation "officer for national defense". Every company, every institution, whether it was large or small, had, back in those days, an officer for ONO and DSZ[113] Milenko, however, wasn't like the hundreds of others. He wasn't an ordinary officer. He wrote to the Military Headquarters and asked for permission to prove his patriotic duty on his feet, walking from watchtower to watchtower, along the Yugoslav border. Within three months, he had walked all over the borders with Albania, Macedonia, and half of that with Bulgaria. He couldn't go further and he didn't have enough time – the country was falling apart, and Milenko was among the first to put on the colourful, military uniform of the Serb army. The transformation happened overnight, or so it seemed to those who had not been informed properly. The spokesperson of the Crisis Headquarters of the Serb Democratic Party couldn't be just anyone. In 1992, he gave inflammatory speeches on the graves of dead soldiers:

113 National defense and social self-protection

"To the Serbian Land! Dear Mother! Don't cry! With the heroic death of your son, the valiant (he would then mention the unfortunate person's name), we are building our future!" He would blaze in this passionate delivery over the dugout hole, while the parents, wrapped in black mourning garments, symbols of their pain and grief, sobbed in tears. In the Serb Democratic Party, they understood that such an orator would be best suited to the position of a director or editor in chief of the radio station, and he accepted these, and all other roles, all in one, and at once. This is how Milenko got hold of the microphone. For the most serious situations, he would sit in the police car with speakers on the top. He would cruise through the town and yell from the bottom of his lungs into the megaphone:

"Hand over your weapons! All citizens who don't hand over their weapons will face the consequences!"

The citizens who the next day saw the police car with the speakers on it swore that they heard, and recognised his voice, exclaiming:

"We have freed our sacred Serb land! This is our biggest victory since the battle at Kosovo! The great hour of the return of the Little-Turks to their true religion, the Orthodox religion! The christening of the non-Serb population starts tomorrow morning! All Muslims are expected to be in front of the Orthodox church at 8 am tomorrow! I repeat: Christening will start tomorrow morning..."

Samir shook behind the curtain. He was an atheist, and wasn't very interested in religion. The brotherhood and unity of his father's garrison had overflowed into the everyday life of his family. And besides, he was married to a Serb woman.

"Samir, what should we do?" she had asked him, shaken and worried.

"We'll do what we must! To save both of us!"

Night fell. He couldn't sleep; he rolled around in his bed, and finally managed to close his eyes for a moment. The tiredness had tricked him, but the nightmare didn't! His dream was of actual reality; he was standing in a long queue in front of the church. An unknown soldier in a camouflage uniform appeared out of nowhere, and he was to be his godfather.

"What will your name be?" he asked him brusquely.

"Slobodan Kovačević!" he responded.

They gave him a white towel to wrap around his neck. He stood in front of the priest Dragan, lost and confused.

"According to our Orthodox practice," the priest explained, "you enter into the new faith voluntarily, not forcefully. You bring with you a pure soul and a new name!"

He poured the blessed water three times over him.

"We are baptising the God's servant, Slobodan Kovačević, in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. Amin."

With the holy oil, making the sign of the cross on his forehead, he completed the anointing.

He woke up in a sweat, in a kind of spasm that wasn't going away. It followed him all the way down the road all the way to the Orthodox church. He found several other confused people already waiting at the church gate. Their number grew as they waited in front of the closed doors. At some point the Serb police turned up!

"Go home!" They ordered the wretches.

As he was walking back to the town, the song "Blue River" popped into his head, the one he loved the most. He was greatly affected, as if he could really hear the legendary voice of Davorin Popović singing on their first original studio album of the rock band *Indeksi*, the longest, most complex, and most poignant song.

No one knows where it's to be found
There's much we don't know, but it is known:
Past the hills yonder, past valleys
Seven further and then eight more
And then more fierce, and wilder yet,
Through the nightmares, the harsh terrain,
Past the hawthorn, through the brambles,
Despite the swelter and tether,

He thought that after this farcical, unsuccessful baptism he would be freed of the burden and fear. But the anxiety wouldn't go away. It seemed to him

that just now, walking from the church to the town beneath the hundred year old trees near the Bolnička alley, he could truly feel the metaphor and depths of Mak Dizdar[114], the one whose (mutual) religion he had been ready to abandon.

Past suspicion, despite all doubt,
Nine more to go, and then ten still.

Deep inside the bowels of the Earth,
And over there under the sky,
Then keep going, stronger, deeper
After silence, after the dark,
Where the rooster crows no longer
And the horn is mute, forgotten.
And then more fierce, and wilder yet,
Beyond thine mind, after God's time,

Beyond thine mind, after God's time... Only in this verse, on the syncopated beat, did the singer raise his voice by an octave, with an intense rhythm section accompanying him. The dramatic introduction to the culmination of the song:

There's a blue river to be found.
A vast river, a deep river,
A vastness of one hundred years,
A thousand years its depths do reach,
And the distance one can't fathom,
An impenetrable darkness.
There's a blue river to be found,
There's a blue river to be found;
All of us must cross that river.

114 Mehmedalija – Mak Dizdar, Bosnian and Herzegovinian poet (b.1917-1971)

At the entrance to his building he bumped into his neighbour Ajša who lived on the third floor.

"Samir, did you hear about the christenings?"

"Yes," and to cut his misery and explanations, he said, "From today I am Slobodan Kovačević!"

Ajša had had a tough life, and she was a bright and resourceful woman. She would always look on the positive side when life threw obstacles at her.

"Oh, be quiet, Samir. Keep your head on your shoulders! At least you have the same initials as before!"

The "christening" was harshly condemned by the highest headquarters in Pale[115], and after that the event was veiled in silence, as if it had never occurred. Actually, they had made a news report on the local radio (which no one believed) that some irresponsible persons, who were being allegedly searched for, had stolen a police car and had arbitrarily started calling the Muslim population to convert. Whatever the case was, the speaker Milenko was unstoppable, and he moved onto national rhetoric and nationalistic speeches, and Samir, with his new "unbaptized" name Slobodan Kovačević, was forced into a Serb uniform and pushed into war in Posavina. He survived, without scars on his body, but with wounds in his soul.

Freedom, what that other poet sang about, couldn't sing by herself. His wife left him for another man while he was away fighting. And he escaped, as soon as he got the chance, from himself, and his hometown.

Many years have passed since then. Life brought new challenges, and the song, when he would hear it from time to time, had acquired a new meaning. The lyrics, he felt, didn't sound as it used to. Deep down he felt that he didn't make it to the other side of the shores of the blue river. He didn't remarry. He didn't have any children, but he returned to himself. He changed his name.

His name is Samir Kadrić again.

115 Serb military headquarters

Before the war in Sarajevo there were three men who had the same name and surname who had all contributed to the city in their own way. Authors Dario Džamonja and Abdulah Sidran wrote about these men in an inspired and nostalgic way. The first was Slobodan Kovačević, the son of the well-known doctor Blagoje Kovačević who was the namesake of the hospital Koševo in Sarajevo. This Slobodan Kovačević was a harmless and autistic young man from Višnjik (suburb of Sarajevo) who didn't differentiate people by their souls, but by their family tree. He knew the genealogy of basically all the Sarajevans he would interact with in his small circle of contacts.

The second Slobodan Kovačević studied fine arts and was a musician. He played in the band *Pro Arte* and shared his time on earth and generational "code" with the third Slobodan Kovačević. To differentiate them on records and as composers, they would add an initial of their father's first name: Slobodan M. Kovačević and Slobodan A. Kovačević. *Pro Arte*'s Slobodan moved to Split in the mid-seventies, where he formed the band *More* (The Sea), which made the singer Meri Cetinić famous with the song of the same name as the band.

The front man of the band *Indeksi,* and one of the most successful composers of pop-rock music in Yugoslavia, Slobodan A. Kovačević, spent the war as a refugee in Prague. He returned immediately after the Dayton Peace Treaty was signed. He died on the 22nd of March in 2004 in Sarajevo, aged 58. He was married to Edina Filipović with whom he had a daughter named Hana. In his biography it is stated that he had a degree in architecture, and that aside from music, he was a painter. His watercolours were at an enviable artistic level.

When choosing the name of his idol for the conversion, Samir K. had no idea that the famous guitarist was actually, through his father, a Muslim! Slobodan Bodo Kovačević, son of Adem and Blaženka, was born in the first years after the Second World War, and he was an example of the "rule" of the open-minded, multiethnic Bosnia of the time – where one shouldn't judge someone by their name, religion, or ethnicity/nationality, but by their character and good deeds. This is how the story of the absurdity of one Muslim "converting" and taking a "Serb" name of another Muslim unintentionally came full circle and gave the full dimensions of this grotesque picture of a time tarnished by nationalistic madness.

Sleep Soundly, My Darling. The Dogs Are Sleeping Now, Too

Stipo Kopčić received the invitation to be "exchanged" in the summer of 1992. He spent his final evening in his house in the Usora suburb in a nightmare, which could be created only by the mixture of the joy at the thought that he was leaving the hell of the occupied town and feelings of desperation for having to leave his home, to which he had devoted his whole life, including mortgages and all of his worker's salaries, earned at the *Montaža* factory. They didn't know anyone in the place where they were going. Who knows what awaits them, if they'll even allow them to cross the border. He didn't sleep a wink, and could barely wait for dawn. Two bags that were packed long ago were ready and waiting in the hallway. Behind him and his wife, Ljubica, the lock clicked when he locked the door as if he wasn't closing his house, but himself, from the outside, on the doorstep which led to a life sentence of being an unconvicted exile.

Šargo followed their steps. He had been thinking about him the night before. Why couldn't the dog be exchanged? Who to leave him with when all of his neighbours were leaving too?

"Ljubica, let the dog out!" he said, opening the gate.

He didn't turn to look at the house; he was ashamed to lock eyes with his dog. With footsteps as heavy as lead they walked along the train tracks, to a place of no return. in fact, since the narrow-gauged Usora-Teslić railway line was abolished, trains hadn't been active for ages. The crumbling remains of the former railway embankment existed now only by name and in memory, and they led him to the town which he would see for the last time today.

"Is he following us?"

"He is!"

A miserable tear twinkled treacherously in his eye. "I won't cry – for Ljubica's sake," he thought. "I want to spare my wife from my suffering, she

has enough of her own before this long journey." He surreptitiously wiped his cheeks with his sleeve.

"Is he still following us?"

"Yes!"

On the little bridge over the Liješanj creek, near the railway signal, they put their bags down and both turned around. The dog stopped as well. He avoided looking directly at his feeders and protectors, and looked to the side. He had never followed them around anywhere earlier, but this morning his canine instinct felt something secretive happening, something heavy and large in their unspoken words, in the silence, the bags, the locking of the front door. They had filled up his bowl to the brim, as well as an extrapot, a new one, from the kitchen, to have enough to eat for three days. They let him off his lead. He understood! The travel bags, the squeak of the gate, and the silence, he knew when humans were silent that meant parting, and goodbyes. He hadn't touched his food.

"Šargo, go home!" Stipo struggled to utter.

The dog looked at him. The delivery of the order was strange. The Master's throat seized up, he had wanted to say "Go, guard our house!" but then the command became meaningless; to guard the house for whom?

When Šargo would run away on his little adventures in the past, and he would find him somewhere in the Usora, he would yell at him at the top of his lungs, "Go home right now!" The dog would obey instantly, and running ahead of him, find his home infallibly. Now, as they were leaving, when they had to leave him alone like this, at his mercy, to find his way alone, "Go home right now" felt absurd, too difficult and didn't make sense. And it was painful.

"Šargo please, go home," Ljubica whispered and started crying.

They didn't stop anymore. They knew that their hairy guardian was panting about a hundred metres behind them.

The buses were stopping in front of the High School Centre. They first had to stop by the police station as they were told that they had to hand over the keys to their house, and to sign a form stating that they were leaving voluntarily and that they were donating their possessions to the Serbian municipality. Otherwise, they couldn't get exchanged.

A huge crowd of people were squeezed together while the officials from Red Cross were reading out names from lists and dividing up families and

the neighbours of yesterday. There was a roar in his head, as if the sky was pressing on him.

The dog felt the anxiety of the human crowd and kept to the side, panting in the heat, trying to understand the unusual sight, and wanting to be comforted by his master.

"Šargo, go home!" Stipo looked at him for the last time, stepping on to the bus, and started crying aloud, not even bothering to hide his "masculine" tears, the biggest and most bitter tears of his life.

The doors closed.

The engine scared the dog. He ran after the bus, first indecisively, then at full speed, chasing the uncatchable passengers, until the "exchange" bus took off at an intersection.

He ran to the main park and stopped, confused. This must be some huge human mistake. An unreachable and incomprehensible misunderstanding. Maybe the bus will come back? Maybe Stipo and Ljubica, maybe even their son Anto, who had left a month earlier in an exchange, will come out of the bus and be excited to see him, pat him on the head, and head back to their house in Usora.

He looked around. He searched for faces he knew and liked, listened for familiar voices.

There was nothing left!

Confused and abandoned, he shivered in fear. Hunger drew him from the bushes. On the door of the restaurant, where the smell of food was wafting from, a colourful uniform appeared.

"Get away, you mut!" he yelled, kicking him in the ribs with the club.

He ate the first bit of bread the next day. A woman had snuck him a bite from her bag. Later, children would feed him. He discovered he wasn't alone; dozens of dogs had overnight become strays and homeless. Every day there would be more of them on the streets.

He found shelter under a staircase in a building. The children from the building shared their lunches with him.

The eldest boy was thrilled with the company of dogs and with his new role as their leader.

"They are ours now! They will protect us from war!"

The youngest kids gazed in wonder at their hairy protectors.

"The dogs have multiplied!" the war-president announced at a meeting in the Crisis Headquarters. "We need to take action!"

Two days later, at dawn, armed people started chasing a pack of dogs to a clearing between buildings. Then they started shooting.

"Mum, they're killing our dogs?!" asked a child, woken up and terrified by the shooting.

"Don't worry, my son. That's just the army shooting for fun. Sleep soundly, my darling. The dogs are sleeping now, too!"

The exchange of peoples, begun in secret negotiations between Franjo Tuđman and Slobodan Milošević, and later with Alija Izetbegović and other leaders of nations, was done in blood and tears from 1992 to 1995. Ethnic cleansing and forced deportation of peoples who until yesterday had been neighbours and natives of the area, as well as the occupation of new territories, was the end goal and darkest side of the war. The result of these nationalist and fascist policies in the divided country, incapacitated for "normal" functioning, is visible to this day in every corner of Bosnia and Herzegovina. More than two million people, over half of the pre-war population, were displaced during the war. Of this number, 1,200,000 people applied for international protection and moved to over 100 countries across the world.

The ethnic cleansing left an everlasting wound in the lives of the refugees and changed the demographics of Bosnia and Herzegovina to the core, especially in the Doboj region. The region that used to be the municipality of Doboj is now divided into three newly created municipalities: Doboj, Doboj-South, and Doboj-East, and in the meantime Stanari have become a separate municipality.

According to the census from 1991 and 2013, the comparative statistics show how the war drastically altered the ethnic picture in our region. According to the census, before the war Doboj had 102,540 citizens, and today there are 89,644. The demographics, represented numerically and in percentages are as follows:

	1991	2013
Bosniaks:	29,203 (30.7%) -	15,322 (21.4%)
Croats:	10,676 (11.2%) -	1,845 (2.6%)
Serbs:	47,133 (49.5%) -	52,628 (73.7%)
Other:	8,201 (8.6%) -	1,646 (2.3%)

After the Dayton Peace Treaty and the redrawing of borders won during the war, there was a "big move" of communities or parts of communities from old to new municipalities. The ethnic picture of Doboj's villages was changed as well; three Bosniak villages became Serb ones, three Croat villages are now Serb ones, and one Serb village has no more residents and has become abandoned.

The city of Doboj, in 1991, had 27,498 residents, while in the census in 2013 it had less, 25, 132. Based on their "nationality", this is what the statistics showed then and what it is today:

	1991	2013
Bosniaks:	11,154 (40.6 %) -	3,797 (15.1%)
Croats:	2,714 (9.9%) -	704 (2.8%)
Serbs:	8,011 (29.1%) -	19,586 (77.9%)
Other:	5,619 (20.4%) -	1,045 (4.2%)

The statistics don't concern themselves with the loss of human lives, partial or full disabilities, the individual or collective tragedy of the people – the town dwellers. This category is shoved into "national" pens; wealthy religious leaders and nationalistic leaders are now crying over them, and will use their suffering as fuel for new wars.

People - "human sheep" - had at least some kind of choice, at least after the war, while household pets, to whom this story is dedicated, were collateral damage of the callous people.

Warriors on the Internet

The war was better!

He began writing as he fondly remembered the war days, embittered by the peace in which war profiteers who didn't set foot near a front line made millions, and the actual fighters could barely make ends meet. Max Wolf, that's how he named himself, took a deep breath and started searching for the keys on his keyboard with two fingers. He didn't feel hatred, or vengeful, just a bottomless, suffocating emptiness into which his sorrow started seeping.

"While I still have my mind," he thought, "I'll write everything as it happened. I'm not ashamed of anything; there was a war, I was an honest man before the war, honest during the war, I didn't run from the front lines, and I won't run from the truth now!"

The evening chill was creeping into the room, and he shivered and stood up to close the window. He lit a cigarette, took a drag, and looked again at the open internet page: The Fighters' Forum. Written by anonymous Croats, Bosniaks, Serbs, and others. Max Wolf was the name he used on the forum, he liked the foreign-sounding name, even though he wouldn't be afraid to use his real name. You can run from a name, but not from the truth!

"I'm not an Internet warrior – I'm a warrior on the Internet!" he mumbled to himself into his beard, continuing to type under the title written in bold font:

Note No. 94731, author: Max Wolf Usora – Attack on Doboj

"It's the first time in my life I'm writing like this, and I apologise for my ineptitude at using a laptop. I'm old school and prefer direct face to face communication. Even though I'm in my early 40's, I was a participant in the attack on Doboj on the 12th of July 1992. This is known as the attack on Putnik Hill, Makljenovac, and for the Army of Republika Srpska known as bloody St. Peter's Day. I was a part of the 2nd Fighting Unit of the 110th Brigade of The Croatian Defence Council, Usora, which was the strongest unit within the

aforementioned brigade, the so called 2nd Impentetrable Fighting Unit, which had never lost a foot of land. It was made up of Croatian villages in the municipality of Doboj: Makljenovac, Ularice, and Alibegovci. The task of the 2nd Fighting Unit at the time (for most of the unit) was taking the Putnik Hill, that is the left side of Visoka Glavica, Razbenjak, Porin, which is what we achieved. We captured two T-34 tanks. We waited for the right side from which the 203rd Brigade of the Army of Bosnia and Herzegovina was attacking. The second part of the Unit, which I was a part of, attacked Makljenovac and came out to the targeted destination, with intense fighting in the Zubci area, and there we captured the PAT 20/3 anti-aircraft gun.

This is just a rough account, it was an intense battle, definitely the biggest for the duration of the war in that area. According to information I have access to, there were around 80 casualties in the Army of Republika Srpska, six for the Croatian Defence Council, and 24 for the Army of Bosnia and Herzegovina. I will write more about how it all happened in detail later on, and if anyone is also interested in the second part of the Unit where my brother was, it will be all firsthand account. There's enough for a whole novel.

Next time I'll write about how we shot down a helicopter and captured a peak Šumareva kuća[116], and the capturing of a T-55. I'm telling you, without false modesty, there's enough for a novel, but believe me that we fought for four years, where for one year, from 1993-1994, we were completely encircled, and for the others we were half-circled."

Max Wolf stopped typing. As he carefully reread his sentences, on the Internet Forum, almost instantaneously, a new message appeared underneath his text. The subheading read:

Note No. 98183, author: Tešnjak OG 7 JUG

"Tešanj and Usora survived thanks to the mutual efforts of the Croats and Muslims. Thank you to the Croats of Usora for Putnik Hill, and two other military operations which were carried out together with the Army of Bosnia and Herzegovina. After that we had fewer joint operations because politics got involved.

An example of what Tešanj was like is illustrated perfectly by the fact that not a single church, Catholic nor Orthodox, was demolished by the Army of

116 Forester's House

Bosnia and Herzegovina during the war. The Serbs were targeting us from anywhere and everywhere. I personally would've wanted the war to have gone on for two more years, and then whoever wins – wins. Now we have been left in an even worse war. Tešanj and this area didn't fall thanks to the hearts and bravery of everyone from this part of Bosnia and Herzegovina. We never wished to occupy Doboj and Teslić, so we never bothered to do that. The whole time the Main Headquarters (in Sarajevo) was dragging the army away from here to other war zones (Bihać, Sanski Most, Vozuća, Sarajevo, Ključ, and all the other zones), and parts of the Croatian Defence Council, the "Hawks" and similar formations were sent to Glamoč and other zones, the end goal being to prevent the military operation Doboj – Tuzla. In 1995, units of the Croatian Defence Council in Novi Šeher brought artillery that was intended to be used in an attack on Teslić and Doboj. 7000 soldiers would probably succeed in their efforts to free Doboj and Teslić from the warring Serb soldiers (not civilians). However, the peace treaty arrived in 1992, because the West didn't want Bosnia and Herzegovina with a majority Muslim population.

Thank you to the Croats for their help during, and after the war. A message to Serbs: Realize that the war is over and that we're not your enemies, and that you started the attacks because you thought that everything is Serbian, even the sky, the waters, the birds, and the forests. Well, it's not. Wake up!"

Note No. 94759, author Max Wolf Usora – Attack on Doboj

We waited impatiently for that day, for the attack on Doboj, for the "penetration", that's how we called it. At that time, it was our first offensive action. Up until then we had focused our efforts on active defence. The plan of action was a frontal attack in the direction Vila in Makljenovac – the bridge on the confluence of the rivers Usora and Bosna, over Londža, five houses of the Zubak families, Putnik Hill, Porin... From today's perspective, the attack was stupid, frontal, instead of "wedging" ourselves in, and "tearing the lines at the seams". However, we were an army in the making, more guerrilla without professional leadership. I'm sorry for the chronological inconsistencies but it's impossible to write everything in order.

Days before the attack, our reconnaissance team examined their positions, we knew that area like the back of our hands; we had grown up there. Our leader was Stipo, our commander, the bravest and most capable soldier of the

Croatian Defence Council, and I think of the Army of Bosnia and Herzegovina, too. We were meant to head off at around seven in the morning, however this didn't happen as the attack was postponed. This was very lucky for us because the Serbian side knew of the attack and was ready and waiting for us at seven AM. However, around ten, they said: "Get ready! We're going!" We were only waiting for Stipo; he was in talks with the left wing of our attack. We then heard a sharp explosion from that direction, and we ran towards them, and what a sight awaited us. Stipo had lost his head, another one next to him dead as well, two wounded, howling, one was blinded. "What happened?" we asked.

Stipo had been showing them how to work the "hand cluster bomb M79" and it had been activated. This was a real shock! The man who was supposed to lead us had died! He was a true commander, a man who knew no fear. There was disbelief on our faces, but we kept going. We had to pass by on a country road which, the day before, hadn't been mined. That day we saw landmines on top of one another. We gave up on demining and decided to crawl over the field. There was a clearing and we could see the Serb trenches. Dear God, how careless they were! They had been waiting for us in the morning, but now they thought it was indefinitely postponed. It was their lunch time, and they were eating casually and lying around. We showered them with bombs and bullets, and they didn't get a chance to shoot a single round. The PAT 20/3 was there as well. We captured the targeted area. We found around ten soldiers of the Army of Republic of Srpska lying around and we took their weapons, plus the PAT 20/3 and the ZiS tank destroyer, but we were horrified at the look of their trenches and communications network... we only had holes in the ground.

Then the heavens opened up. Rain started pouring – what rain, it was a hurricane! We were wet to the bone, but that wasn't the worst thing that befell us. Our Motorolas were also wet so we couldn't communicate with any other unit...

So, we had no communication with any other unit. We smashed through the targeted area.

We attempted to try out the PAT 20/3, turning it so it would shoot to the right of us, however because of all the rain it had sunk into the ground and was difficult to properly position it. I volunteered to shoot because no one was trained to use those weapons. I squeezed the pedal. What a feeling,

better than an orgasm! The tracers left a trail of smoke from three barrels, followed by frightful explosions. Branches are broken, bricks in houses are knocked out. What pleasure. Everything is flying in all directions. We fire some more grenades and head for another attack; what happens, happens. Hopefully our units aren't over there...

But it's not just burning here. A whole line is on fire, around 10 kilometres long, it's crazy! We see the Serbs running from those houses downhill towards Doboj. I take my sniper rifle and I see two men carrying a third wounded man. I leave them as they're not a threat. They're shooting at us from a small house made of solid bricks. Without an optical device I can see smoke and reddish dust from which a PKT-84 is shooting, and there are two more soldiers with low calibre weapons. My best friend "Mrki" calls me and yells at me to shoot the '84. The tip of the arrow was above the butt. I saw it clearly. I knew exactly every time when I'd hit the target. After shooting, the PKT 84 fell out of the window, and the other two soldiers left, abandoning their co-fighter.

We still didn't have any communication lines. The commander decided that some of us should stay behind in the conquered area. This area is right above the town. We're all looking at our hometown for the first time since the 5th of May 1992, and today is the 12th of July 1992. We're very proud. The other half of our Unit will re-join the neighbours on the right, not having any information on whether or not they made it through. In any case, we can hear ongoing fire from their side, and we're also wearing bands on our shoulders by which they can identify us. Around 50 metres down the road, behind a bend, we see two men walking with bazookas. We recognise them, and they're wearing the bands. They recognise us as well and point to a trench on the hill. They lift their bazookas and shoot. We join in. Twenty of us were shooting at the trench, and we threw five bombs. That soldier kept his ground for twenty minutes. In the end we found him with only one arm. A bomb had blown off the other. He was amazing, he fought like a lion!

Then came the close combat because the houses were built next to one another. It only took around 15 minutes for us all to get mixed up: we held two houses, the Serbs the next two, then we held three, the Serbs held three... I was lucky to have captured the rifle M-70AB[117] and M80s, two hand-held rocket launchers, because a sniper rifle in a twenty meter distance isn't really advantageous. As I change the rifle frame, I can see a man writhing in pain as

117 M-70 assault rifle, nicknamed "the Gypsy"

he is wounded. A paramedic approaches him and bandages his wound. When he finished, the wounded guy shot him in the head. I knew the wounded guy from the streets, and he was also wearing our band. I wasn't paying attention to the paramedic; however, the wounded man was, and that was the paramedic's end.

In this chaos, three brothers died within ten minutes, trying to help each other out. There was lightning on all sides. I felt the earth quaking at one point the clattering of the caterpillar tracks on asphalt is stomach-churning. We could hear a tank approaching. We couldn't see it, but we feel the nausea. We're in a house that is on the wall which extends fifteen metres upwards. I take apart the rocket launcher and carefully tread outside. I still couldn't see it. In that moment, the guys who were further down start targeting and hit the tank. It moved around five more metres and then stopped. To our surprise we see that the tank has two parallel gun barrels. It's smoking. Mrki and Prco yell at me to throw bombs at it. I put the rocket launcher down, grab a bomb and throw it in the large opening of the dome. They do the same. My bomb falls exactly where I aimed. The explosions echo, first, second, third... I had an opportunity to see that beast closer. It was a double barrelled, 57 mm with a T-55 chassis. We were already holding 80% of the houses...

Note No. 91875, author: Mili 77 Doboj – Doboj War zone: St. Peter's Day Battle, 1992

Hello everyone, regarding the loss of the Army of the Republic of Srpska and the Police of Republic of Srpska, in this battle, according to many monographies and sources of BORS[118], in the period from the 12th to the 20th of July 1992, a total of 50 fighters lost their lives. Of these, 45 soldiers were soldiers from the Army of the Republic of Srpska, and 5 from the police forces. Most of them died in the area of Makljenovac, 40 of them, 3 in Doboj, and 7 fighters in Stanovi.

How many died on the enemies' side I don't know, and don't want to guess. I've heard many stories over the years, how a civilian from the community brought the enemy to us because he was there with the fighters from the Army of Republic Srpska every day, bringing them food and drinks. Actually, it was said that on that day, on the 12th of July 1992, he brought a large group of enemy fighters with Serb signs on their uniforms, and as a response to the question

118 Veterans' Organization of the Republic of Srpska

"who are they?", they replied: "We're Krajina men." The guests allegedly brought roast meat off the spit and a canister of rakija for their hosts and, allegedly, got them drunk, and with this operation silently killed 37 of our fighters. According to another story, our side had relaxed and was sunbathing, and the enemy caught them by surprise.

Note No. 91721, author: Putnik Hill – Fighter

I'll try and clarify the intense fighting over several days. The reasons for attacking Putnik Hill, that is, the freeing of Doboj, are these: we needed to unburden the defence of Derventa, because it was critical there, and we needed to bring the Army of the Republic of Srpska on that side, but the main goal was to free Doboj, which had fallen on the 3rd of May 1992. The command of Territorial Defence of Doboj and the 110th Brigade of the Croatian Defence Council concluded that they could successfully execute an offensive, that we had enough strength, and that meant we had enough weapons and our artillery consisted of a few mortars with a few shells, the rest were guns and hand rocket launchers, but our morale was high and we wanted to win. The decision was made, we were to leave at dawn on the 12th of July 1992. However, due to unknown reasons, we left sometime before noon, which was lucky for us, because the Serbs knew we were going to attack. The information had leaked from the traitors, the "fifth column", which had been strong for the whole duration of the war.

The attack was frontal, on the whole length of Makljenovac, from the mouth of the river Usora to Putnik Hill, the so called "češalj" (hairbrush). What kind of plan was this when there wasn't a single unit in the reserves for backup? Those who were going to penetrate the area were supposed to take and hold the combat line, and they were the Territorial Defence, that is the 203rd Brigade of the Army of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the 2nd Fighting Unit of the 110th Brigade of the Croatian Defence Council, by far the strongest unit made up of villagers of the municipality of Doboj.

Just before noon all hell broke loose along the lines, some 5-6 kilometres long, which would last the next seven days, as an offensive, and as defence. I've never experienced something like that since, and I've seen a lot; you couldn't even leave the shelter to piss.

To be specific, my unit had the task of overcoming the peak Razbjenjak and Visoka glavica, that is, the left side of Putnik Hill, and then to join the forces of

the 203rd Doboj Brigade which would come from the right side of Putnik Hill. I don't want to describe the battle in detail, and it was intense and bloody, from both sides; however, according to some information we received, the losses on the side of the Army of Republic of Srpska were horrendous. We lost four men, and I can't remember how many were wounded. We captured four soldiers as prisoners from the Army of Republic Srpska, two tanks and a load of weapons, and took all the positions we had targeted, and waited for the 203rd Brigade to join us. However, they got held up in intense battles, they won over some targets, some not, they got all mixed up, blood up to their elbows, some didn't make it out. I know this from some of their stories, but I wasn't there with them so I won't divulge any further.

We stayed up there for two days, shot all the shells that were in the tanks, partly on Doboj, partly on Stanovi. Upon retreating, we destroyed the tanks because we couldn't start them, we took the Browings off the tanks and collected all the machine guns from the inside, the old Russian ones with drum magazines which use ammunition like the M-84 machine guns.

We surprised the Army of the Republic of Srpska, caused huge losses, showed them that we were dangerous and that it wouldn't be easy moving forward as it was at the beginning of the war. Of course, we had casualties too, 6 soldiers from the Croatian Defence Council and 24 from the Army of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

After our retreat, the Army of the Republic of Srpska non-selectively showered the Usora villages with shells, in such a way that it cannot be explained or described. This went on for days! I don't understand how their barrels didn't fall apart?! Furious because of their losses, they took their rage out on civilian targets. That's how it was, and that is the truth! No hard feelings in this Forum! What can you do? It was war!

Max Wolf read all the messages once again. He stood up and absent-mindedly walked around his room. Memories and images from the war were vivid in his mind. How strange, he thought, I can see everything again, but I can't hear anything! And then it was the other way round, on Putnik Hill I had become an ear. The shooting and explosions were very close. They thundered in one's ears.

He sat back down at his laptop.

Note No. 95267 author: Max Wolf Usora

Now I'll tell you about another operation in our war zone. The peak Šumareva kuća in Krnjin was a big problem for the civilian population of the western villages in the Usora area. The constant fire on Usora from all kinds of projectiles, from infantry to artillery missiles, was taking its toll on the civilians who were killed by the PAT 20 mm!

The commander of the 110th Brigade of the Croatian Defence Council assigned the task to our unit. We didn't rush, we did a thorough reconnaissance of the terrain, planned all the details and decided to go about things quietly, without artillery etc. Before the night fell, we went behind the Serb lines and waited for the morning to complete our mission. We were divided into four groups, seven soldiers in each group. Three groups were meant to do the trenches, and the fourth - my group - was assigned to attack a tank which was in the back line with the crew. We learned that there were six soldiers there, four of whom we liquidated. We captured the tank crew and two more soldiers. Their surprise was complete. We started the attack with a bomb, then a round of detonations and gunfire followed. There was no mercy. First we imprisoned the tank crew in the basement, tied them up with insulating tapes and waited for the retreat of the rest of their infantry, who were running away. We didn't even get a chance to ask the four soldiers to surrender because the battle escalated so quickly. When the fire calmed down for a bit, we invited the other survivors to surrender. Terrified and grateful to be alive, another two surrendered as well!

Šumareva kuća was ours! The local infantry followed us to secure the peak we won by digging the shelters. We had our war bounty: a tank, a B1 gun, a PAT, a few mortars, a load of infantry weapons and ammunition.

Šumareva kuća remained in our hands for the rest of the war.

Note No. 95313, author: Ozrenac 40

"This Max is bragging as if he had won the war. With two or three battles you didn't get anything! The Serb army achieved its war objective and conquered everything it intended to! Everything that was on the maps in 1992 stayed in our hands, and you got your territory through the Dayton [Peace Treaty]. This is why everything you've written is irrelevant to the course of the war. We got everything on the battlefront and lost in negotiations. And you got it the other way round..."

Max Wolf read this last message twice. He promised himself that he wouldn't "politicize" anything on the Forum, but a worm from the unfinished battle was wriggling within him. He went back to the desk, and, as an echo to some previous comments, and especially this latest one, the anger overflowed from his soul.

Note No. 96039, author: Max Wolf Usora

It is stated here without any basis that Serbs were victorious thanks to their military, and that the Croatian Defence Council, Croatian Army and the Army of Bosnia and Herzegovina received it as a gift. We won't have it that way! The war was dirty and calculated, even the sparrows in the trees knew that there were negotiations throughout the war and that territories were bartered. Why did Posavina fall? In whose interests did this happen? I won't discuss it here, I'm concerned with Doboj. And here is what happened in my hometown:

1. Doboj was taken by the Serbs without a single round fired (from the defeated side).
2. The only offensive on Doboj during the entirety of the war was on the 12th of July 1992 and never again. We all know the geographical position of Doboj, that it is the doorway of Posavina and the only entrance and exit to Ozren.
3. Politics guaranteed Doboj to the Serbs! Think about this: The Army of Bosnia and Herzegovina attacks Vozuća with two corps to join Tuzla, and that is 50 kilometres to breakthrough. Through Doboj it is only 5 kilometres to breakthrough!
4. Could the defence of Doboj have resisted two corps of 50, 000 men who were attacking Vozuća, plus the 110th, 111th Brigades and the 3rd Guard Brigades of the Croatian Defence Council, that would have joined to assist in liberating Doboj? Strange decisions were made! So strange, that stranger they couldn't be! These war plans smell like politics. For a clever person this is enough...

He wanted to add a few more sentences to convince this stranger who might read his message, but he felt tired, and the pointlessness of battle after battle. He looked at his ashtray full of cigarette butts.

"This is enough for today," he said out loud and closed his laptop.

"The war was better! I didn't smoke as much then and I didn't talk out loud to myself!"

He stood up to stretch his legs and to open the window. The room stank of cigarette smoke. He needed some fresh air to clear his head before bed.

"The war isn't over! It will be on the Internet forever! If, God forbid, it comes to a real war again, no one will stop us! Not anymore! There will be no politics and no negotiating! I know where the biggest clash ahead of us will be the fiercest!"

Flight

Tešanj, 28/12/1995

Our dear Fijo, Mesud, and Samir,

I'm finally going to write a few words even though I should've responded earlier. I received the package and 200 Deutsche Marks, for which I am very thankful, as well as for the Marks I received in Doboj. Emil Fačko gave me your phone number last summer, but I couldn't call you for many reasons. The military police collected me from my workplace on the 15th of September 1995. In front of the "Sloga" stadium there was a bus waiting, they pushed us in the bus and drove us to Ozren. There were 50 of us from Doboj, mostly Bosniaks, with around 8 Croats. First we had to load all the ammunition and walked around 70 km, and the soles of my shoes came off - you know the light ones for the summer - like yours. We didn't eat anything for 48 hours. When they ordered us to get off the bus, we had to walk for the whole night in front of guns pointed at us, and just before dawn, around 4 am, we arrived in front of some house. We could see that it was some kind of jail, a room seven by three meters large. Then they took us over some hill, and from where we were, we could see the barracks and some small buildings not far away, in front of which they lined us up. We thought then that they would shoot us. (On that occasion, Ćazim Sarajlić, and Hodža, the former player for the football team "Sloga", escaped). However, they took us not far from there to a hole, around ten meters deep in relation to the field around it. Again we thought it was the end. We thought they would shoot us, because they had closed in, 15-20 of them with automatic guns. In our minds we were already dead, but they needed us alive. To the left and right of us, in that hollow, there was a metal door that led to an underground storage space for ammunition. We had to load grenades and other ammunition onto tow trucks headed for Derventa and some other places. When we had finished and lined up, they discovered that two men were missing. Chaos ensued. The rain started bucketing down, and

we were kneeling in the rain with hands on our necks. Our armed escort Milenko, nicknamed Žuti (Yellow), was howling at us wretches.

"Where did Sarajlić run off to? Where did Hodža run off to?" He was asking everyone, one by one, and when he would hear the reply "I don't know", he would hit with his rifle butt and people would cry out in pain.

One of the soldiers yelled at him from the window.

"Stop it! It's enough!"

Žuti then went to the garage and would call people to come in, and whoever came in had to take their shoes off and would get beaten on the soles of his feet with a steel rod. The skin would crack, bleed, people were screaming, wailing from the pain, until the next officer on duty arrived and ordered Žuti to take us away from there.

In the evening, we started walking again. The Army of Bosnia and Herzegovina was already in the place where we had been the day before, so they redirected us towards the village Petrovo Selo. Civilians were running around, old women, children; livestock was wandering around. We helped them carry their bags to the monastery. There we found military vehicles and a larger group of civilians. A priest arrived with a flashlight and asked who we were.

"We are workers," someone replied.

One of our men walked among us and whispered, "Don't call each other by your names."

Then a woman offered us some rakija, and one of ours couldn't resist but to say, "See, just so you know, Muslims helped you!"

This wasn't a wise thing to say as it could've cost us dearly. All these people from Ozren were headed towards Doboj, and we went to Petrovo Selo where we arrived at a quarter to five in the morning.

(Today is the 8th of February 1996 and I am coming back to the letter now because in the meantime we all had the flu. First the owner Mato Komar, who invited us to stay with him in his house in Tešanj, and then me, then Mirsa and Selma. We were hit hard, and Selma had a fever of over 40 degrees Celsius.)

I am continuing the letter with our account on Ozren.

In Petrovo Selo we received a bit of bread. They took us to the asbestos separation room where we loaded the grenades for two days. When we sat

down to rest, a man called Pejić arrived. His escort Žuti lined us up, and this Serb from Doboj told us that he needed 25 people to dig trenches on the front lines. I found myself among those 25, along with Marko Žižanović, Milan Prepelac and Safet Halilović. The three of them died while digging, as did others. Emil Fačko was also there (and gave me his pullover) with Zvonko Bilić and his brother Josip. They had already taken everything from our pockets: the paperwork – decision on work obligation, identity cards, glasses, tissues, even two small onions. They divided us into several groups. In my group were Dedo Turkić, his son Miralem and brother Smajo, Nedžad Glumčević and Senad Deraković. We dug the trenches and started on the dugouts. We had to work at night as well. We were surrounded by Serb soldiers. Most of them were good.

"Why did we need to jump at our neighbours?" one of them said.

"I wish this could stop, and let the countries call themselves whatever they want!" another added.

Another one of the villagers went back home to collect more food. They asked him what was going on in Doboj.

"Don't even ask," he said. "Doboj is in chaos right now! Our Serbs are running away from the town, and they won't even let us go to Doboj, we have to go to Kotorsko, and there are no houses there. New refugees are arriving and they are being sent to Derventa or to Modriča."

The wandering livestock were slaughtered by the Serbs and they gave meat to us, as well as rakija, but they didn't give us any cigarettes so they cut tobacco leaves. The whole time we were on the front lines, the Army of Bosnia and Herzegovina was there with a reconnaissance. Some man called Mitar stood on the road and watched through binoculars, commenting out loud on what he could see, how they were armed and one of them had "some kind of weapon", another a camera, until Mitar got shot, and died in the middle of the road.

In the morning, we followed orders and started to dig new trenches, when the Army of Bosnia and Herzegovina attacked. First the grenades flew, then the other weapons. We all fled. I lay down behind a tree in the forest. A shell fell nearby, and the earth shook. Bullets were whizzing in the air and shells were exploding in the tree canopies. Slowly the shells were being shot further and further away, and after a short while, through the bushes, about four-five meters away, I could see soldiers in a uniform I'd never seen before, running

through the grass. I didn't know who they were. I heard voices from the nearby.

"Omer! Nazif! Ismet! Meho!"

I realised then that it was the Army of Bosnia and Herzegovina. They stormed out. After some time, I could hear someone speaking. I lifted my head up, and Dedo was carrying Nedžad. Three soldiers of the Army of Bosnia and Herzegovina were with them, headed in the opposite direction. I called out to them, and then that soldier pointed the machine gun at me.

"Don't shoot!" Dedo yelled. "He's one of us!"

I approach them, and the soldier asked me, "Who are you?"

"I'm a Muslim," I said.

"What's your name?"

When I told him my name, he said, "Alright, Fadil, you're free!"

"Help, Nedžad is wounded," Dedo said.

There was blood under his beard. What happened? While I had been hiding, some chetnik had ordered Dedo and Nedžad to collect their dead ones. They had managed to retrieve one, and when they came back for the second one, a shrapnel hit Nedžad and he fell, and Dedo fell on top of him. When Nedžad tried to stand up, a soldier from the Army of Bosnia and Herzegovina ran out of the forest and believed Nedžad to be a chetnik, so he hit him as hard as he could on his temple. Dedo then said they were all Muslims. When they started to leave, this is when I had called out to them. Two more men joined us. Only Senad didn't manage to escape; he stayed with them on the Serb side. In the space of 150-200 meters, we later found out that 23 chetniks died.

Then they took us to the rear forces. We could see two girls in unforms, with bags, walkie-talkies. Nurses. There was also a camera. The food was fantastic, there was coffee... The soldiers threw us five or six packets of "Sarajevo Drina" (cigarettes). We stayed the night with the military police, and the next day, the 23rd of September 1995, they drove us to the jail in Tuzla. At the gate they told us that Serbs from Doboj had expelled 1, 300 Muslims and Croats. In the jail we met with six other people from Doboj who had arrived earlier from Vozuća, and two other men from Doboj had previously joined us in the rear forces. And so, the thirteen of us from Doboj were in jail for 26 days... When the visitors started arriving, one Avdo Hajrulahović told me that Mirsa, Selma and Mejra got out, and that they were in Zenica...

The thirteen of us from Doboj were transferred in the van (belonging to the military police) from Tuzla to Tešanj on the 20th of October 1995, and then to Alibegovci where I spent two days with my brother-in-law Safet. Then I arrived at Mate Komara's house, and he gave me his last 50 Deutsche Marks, and offered his place as a refuge. We were all living off humanitarian aid. Selma was in 8th grade of primary school. She brought one book and some cassettes with her from Doboj, but she had nothing to play the cassettes on...

Here in Tešanj it's "Islamic Iran", in the Republic of Srpska it is Orthodox, and in Croatia, "Catholic Iran".

It is difficult for me to write. I can't concentrate because of the events happening around me and the current situation. Ivo "Cigo" Butković was with us when we were digging the trenches, and returned from Ozren to Doboj, but he got out of Doboj with 12 other Croats. He is with his wife in Jelah. I spoke with him briefly and he told me that you, Mesud, called someone in Doboj, and he also said that Emil was with his mother, and that they stayed in Doboj. Later some people got out (and no one tried to make them stay) via the damaged bridge on the Ušće. A floating bridge has been constructed over the Bosna river near Karuše village, and there was a bus from Doboj towards Teslić escorted by IFOR, and presumably towards Maglaj too. It was safe to say that buses heading towards Tešanj drove through Karuše, even those coming from Germany.

For almost two months we have been able to communicate with Doboj, as well as with Serbia, via mobile phones belonging to HVO. I have to say that the Army of Bosnia and Herzegovina, compared to the Serb army, is like night and day. When our army captured us (freed us), Doboj was meant to fall within 48 hours, but all of a sudden, everything stopped, even though the Third Corps had almost reached Ševarlije, and the Second Corps had reached Petrovo Selo. It's true, in Doboj, NATO planes had destroyed targets in Ševarlije, Potočani, Donje Bare, the telecommunications repeater on Becanj, the antennas near the barracks, the hangars behind Poljoremont...

(11.30 pm - writing interrupted)

Continuing the letter.

Today Haris and I dragged two bags of firewood on sleds from Ahmo and Mujesera; it will help us until Haris manages to acquire two more meters of firewood. Yesterday Jasmina gave me a hundred Deutsche Marks and a package that you sent us, and we thank you again for this.

Tomorrow, the 11/2/1996 marks a year since our brother Mustafa got out of Doboj. He had a hernia operation so I had to take things around the neighbourhood with that woman Ifeta Dervić, to keep them safe. I brought over to my place a fridge, an electric stove, and a washing machine. The machine was carried up in a wheelbarrow with Mirso, step by step from stair to stair. When they headed towards the Red Cross, there were around eight bags, which I drove on the wheelbarrow.

On the third of March I became ill, and when I went to see Dr. Majda. She sent me immediately to the hospital where I spent the next fifteen days, and if Dr. Dabović had not made such an effort to help me, who knows if I'd be alive now. He told Mejra if I had arrived a day later it would've been too late.

An inflammation in both of my lungs, transfusions, eight different pills every six hours, injections of Pembritin, and I was put on sick leave for two and a half months.

My dears, I'm bringing this letter to an end. If you are ever able to do it, please send me a toe nail clipper and a trimmer. Haircuts are expensive here. They cost three to four marks.

I'd love to hear how you are. Write to the address: Mato Komar, for Fadil, Tešanj, Musa Ćazim Ćatić St.

Warmest greetings from your Fadil.(I)

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"They'll shoot us!"

The dark foreboding appeared in that moment when the military police arrived at "Izbor" and looked for him, and only him. They had to report within their companies for the work obligation. They had a list of all the poor souls from the town that now resembled a concentration camp.

"You're going to Ozren to be a worker who will dig trenches!" they told him. "We're dying here, and you *balije* are strolling around the town! This will stop now!"

The bus was packed. At the exit to the town, in Svjetliča, he said goodbye to life, to his dearest ones, to his friends, and to this place to which he had moved a long time ago and had grown to love.

When they arrived and were lined up in Bosnansko Petrovo Selo, he was even more sure that they'd shoot them. We wouldn't be the first, or last, who go missing on Ozren, he thought."We'll be shot, for sure."

"If someone only tries to run, we'll kill them on the spot," a commander, nicknamed Žuti by the other soldiers, threatened them.

Fear freezes the brain. They follow obediently, because despite everything, there still exists a sliver of hope that they might survive.

"Maybe they're not lying. Maybe we really will be digging trenches!"

They followed them on both sides of the line. They walked for a long time, and with every step, in his mind's eye he could see his life unravelling before him, from primary school to high school in Bosanski Šamac, the Faculty of Economy in Belgrade, his golden football days, joining the Doboj "Sloga" team, important matches, his best performances in the red-white football jersey. None of that mattered now. None of that would help him; being a great goalkeeper, a great friend, a great neighbour, a great father, or a great husband. His good character didn't matter here. On this journey to the final destination, in their eyes, he wasn't a man, only a number, faceless, with a worthless name of another "nation" and religion. Suspicion grew and overpowered the feelings of hope.

"They must be lying to us that we're going to be working since they have these guns. They lied so we'd make their jobs easier and so we wouldn't run. There's no one to save us now. They'll shoot us!" he whispered this to Ćazim Sarajlić, the well-known craftsman, a carpenter, now a prisoner marching with him in line.

"I'm going to run!"

Ćazim nodded.

They arrived at a one-storey building in the middle of the forest. The guards stirred. They were coming to and fro, in and out. This was their barracks. For a moment they were left alone, unsupervised. The thought came - now or never! He left the line walking at a normal pace. Ćazim followed him, as if following orders. They went behind the building, expecting shouts and bullets in their backs. Then they ran as fast as they could. A grove was nearby and the branches smacked them in the face.

Run! Run as far away as you can, as far away as possible from this horrible place!

They still couldn't hear any voices. Their flight still hadn't been discovered!

"They will definitely follow us! We have to run faster and get as far away as possible!"

How long they ran through the forest, he had no idea. They were both out of breath and sweat stung their eyes. They were quite far away. They leaned against a tall beech. They could not have been overheard, yet they still whispered:

"We have to split up! Otherwise, they'll kill us together! If they're following us, our chances are greater if we split up. At least one of us will survive!"

Ćazim nodded and without a word went in one direction, and Sarajlić went in another.

Where is east from here, where is west, north, south? Which way to go? Ozren was surrounded by troops! Where to run? To Tuzla? No chance. There are trenches on the separation lines on both sides. To Doboj? Not at all. They'd capture and kill him with no mercy. South? Vozuća is there. The most intense battles. Everywhere there are trenches, minefields, and soldiers. If they're following him, surely they wouldn't anticipate that he'd go in the most dangerous direction, where one could hear shooting and the echoes of shells. He couldn't run anymore, he walked uphill, crawled on all fours, holding on to bushes and branches. He felt like every step he took, every rustle of leaves or crackling of twigs could be heard kilometres away. His heart was beating like mad. Are they following him? Are they close? In the town, he had heard rumours that the Red Berets would take people away from jails and let them try and escape on Ozren, for them to practise on. They would give them half an hour to run. Then they would chase them without guns, only with bayonets. No one ever came back! No one managed to escape!

The rain started. Big drops dripped on the canopies, muting all other sounds.

"I can't stop; I must keep going!" he was forcing himself. Now he came across a steep, muddy, downhill path. He was slipping and falling. They had taken him from work in his summer clothing. He was soaked. The curtain of rain, along with the twilight, darkened the mountain.

"I have to keep going further, before it gets too dark!"

He was standing under an enormous tree, but it couldn't spare him from the rain. He shook from the cold, hugging himself. He wasn't afraid of the forest.

Here there weren't any wild animals - no bears, or wolves, only humans in wolf's skin.

"They won't look for me in pitch darkness. The rain and night are my allies." He tried to convince himself. He curled up against some big forked roots of a tree. The rain was pouring. It was so cold he could barely blink. Every so often he'd stand up, and wave his arms, like he used to do at training sessions while he was a goalkeeper, when warming up was his joy. The night was long; it was never ending. As soon as there was light, he kept moving, cautiously, uphill, and then downhill again. He quenched his thirst at a stream that wedged its way between two small hills.

"If only I could carry water with me," he thought. He lived in the town, twenty kilometres away, and had had no idea that this mountain was so big and the barrenness so endless.

"Am I lost?"

For a moment he thought he was going in circles, as if he had passed this beech grove before.

"No, I'm not!"

This part of the forest is similar, thick, lots of bushes and low plants, ferns. The tall beech trees are thinning out. He must assess the situation before he goes from cover to cover, from bush to bush. The rain has stopped, but the shooting in the distance hasn't. The second night on the mountain was drawing near. He found a hiding place, a hole at the foot of a huge log. He made the hole bigger with his bare hands, crawled inside and covered himself with sticks and branches. Tiredness overcame him and he fell asleep and was woken at dawn in the throes of a nightmare: that they were standing around him, pointing their guns at him! He stopped breathing until the nightmare passed, until he felt his frozen and numb condition. He peered through the leafy covering - no one in sight! He stood up and repeated his warmups.

Before him was the second day of flight. Judging by the moss on the trees, and the shooting which was drawing nearer, he knew he was heading south, slower and more cautiously, making sure he wouldn't stumble into one of their trenches. Around noon, shells started flying all of a sudden. To his left, within a minute of each other, two had gone off. The detonation hurt his ears and the ground shook. He found some shelter, a hole in a huge rock which appeared out of nowhere, as if to protect him.

"This must be our side attacking their positions," he realized. "I'm on the battle line, I'm close!"

The whizzing shells flew over his shelter, exploding further away on the place he had escaped from, and he could hear automatic guns firing nearby. He heard yelling, running through the forest, and he hid even deeper into the hole. How much time had passed, he had no clue. The voices grew fainter, as did the shooting. He got out of the hole and carefully kept moving forward.

"I suppose those from our side are close."

He was running to the right of the spot where the shells had fallen, where the shooting was the strongest. The trenches must be there somewhere! After half an hour of walking next to some ravine, he saw a country road. Whatever happens will be God's will, he thought, and got onto the middle of the road, wet, torn, muddy, bloody, and all cut up. Five minutes later, a vehicle appeared and soldiers in colourful uniforms jumped out, pointing their guns at him.

"Stop! Who are you?"

"Mustafa Hodžić "Hodža". From Doboj," he said and slumped over in front of them.

"What are you doing here?"

"I ran away from Ozren," he said and pointed in the direction he came from.

A beardless young man hung up the Kalashnikov machine gun on his shoulder and walked over to help the man stand up.

"Mustafa, you've just passed through a minefield!"

They covered him with a blanket and took him to their base, a half demolished house in Jablanica. For the first time in three days, he tasted a crust of bread. Then they took him to their headquarters in Bijela Ploča near Maglaj. A grey-haired officer questioned him. He said he knew him, he was the goalkeeper for "Sloga", and he had been the centre-half for "Natron". They don't have any other clothes, he said, but take off your rags, please Hodža, and put this uniform on. It should fit well.

In the gifted uniform, on the 20th of September 1995, he arrived in Tešanj. **(See Endnote II)**

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"Let's split up," he had suggested.

I couldn't run anymore. Hodža was a sportsman, ten years younger, still in his prime, but my energy was on its way out. If they follow us, and I'm sure they will, I hope at least one of us will survive, I thought, and nodded. He ran off. The branches shook behind his back and the forest engulfed him. It started to rain. It was so sudden, like someone had tipped a bucket upside down, and the forest couldn't protect me, I was soaked to the bone. I kept pushing through the thick growth. The fallen leaves were wet, decomposing, and slippery, and slowed me down. Which way to go? Where to go in this enormous forest?

If they catch me, they'll kill me, no questions asked, and no mercy. I must not fall into their hands!

"If only I could get to Maglaj!" I thought and kept walking, as if I really knew which way to go to get to the town. The incline was getting steeper; the ferns were taller than me. Surely no human foot had stepped here. No one will chase me here. It got darker and night fell. I need to stop, find shelter, maybe it's safest by this large rock. The rain wasn't slowing down. I couldn't stop the chattering. I was going to die of cold! As soon as it dawns, I'll keep going. At least it's warmer when you keep moving.

At dawn I could hear the thunder of artillery and shells. The hill I had climbed ended with a cliff and a drop, I couldn't get over, so I had to go back and then around. The rain kept falling and at least I wasn't thirsty. I kept stumbling on small streams, but I couldn't satiate the hunger that was calling from my empty stomach and drying out my mouth.

Before my strength gives out, I have to keep going, I kept telling myself. The forest seemed wider, the beech trunks thicker. The leaves had a bitter taste, and the bark from the branches was hard and tasteless. I'll be sick! It's better to suffer from hunger than to eat leaves and poison myself on this barren mountain. I was moving slower, losing concentration, and I felt, in this numb condition, that someone else was escaping, not me. I spent the next night on the mountain where I fell, in a slippery small landslide of muddy, sticky clay like earth. This is my end, I can't go any further, I thought, not being able to tell whether I was losing consciousness or dreaming.

I was awakened by the cold, and it forced me to move my frozen legs. I'm still alive! I have to keep going!

I don't know how long I had been walking, three to four hours, with no orientation and completely lost, and after some time I pushed through the forest onto a clearing and saw a house on a small hill. An unbelievable image: why is there a house in this wilderness? At once I felt fear reawaken. They must be somewhere nearby! I watched for a long time and couldn't find anything suspicious. Maybe the house was deserted? I climbed the hill slowly, getting closer and closer. The small old-fashioned house emerged, an old Ottoman-style wooden house, looking like it was from the past century. Someone lives here after all! Chickens were flapping their wings in a gated yard. Whatever happens, happens.

"Is anyone there?" I called. Silence ensued. I called again, "Hey! Is there anyone there?"

The door creaked open, and the grey head of an old women popped out.

"Who are you?" She asked.

"I'm lost!" I spoke. "I don't know how to find the road!"

"Just go down this hill and over the stream," she said, pointing out the way.

I stood there indecisively, dirty, torn, wet.

"All of my family have fled as well!" she said "But I don't want to leave my home, so what God wills will be. Are you fleeing as well?"

"I am!"

"It must be from somewhere far away," she said, looking me up and down.

"Yeah, very far away."

"Are you hungry?"

"I am!"

"Wait there, let me bring you something!"

She went into her dilapidated, poor house. When the door opened again, she held half of a small, round scone and a piece of cheese.

"I don't have anything else right now. Take it!"

"Thank you, grandma!" I said, as tears welled up.

"Don't cry! Everything is fine while your head is still on your shoulders! Go, now you can't get lost. The road isn't far away!"

Just before I got to the muddy country road, I heard muffled voices. Old people were whispering to one another, tapping their sticks, coughing, and

stopping every few moments, and women, surrounded by children, were carrying huge sacks and bags.

"We're running away to Doboj! You can't pass to Vozuća anymore! The Mujahidin will kill us all. Death is coming!" said one of them.

Shooting, artillery fire, and shell explosions were becoming more frequent. I followed them. The company kept growing, people kept emerging from the depths of the forest. I helped a woman with two small children carry a bag even though I could barely carry myself. She didn't ask me anything, not even who or what I was. We walked slowly, for quite a long time. When we stopped briefly, she handed me a boiled egg from her sack. I had to hide my tears. Good people in this miserable country are always unfortunate, fleeing war and death.

Finally, we arrived to Pridjel and from a high pass we could see Doboj. For the first time in my life, I wasn't happy to see my hometown. What should I look forward to? Going back to the concentration camp?

We crossed the old metal bridge over the river Bosna and straight after we met the control at the checkpoint at Usora, armed soldiers in colourful uniforms. They were swearing and yelling.

"Where are you all going? The town is full! We don't have anywhere to put you!"

They asked for identification from the men. I gave one of them my dirty, squashed personal identity card.

"What are you doing with them, *balija*?" he barked at me. Others joined him and started beating me.

"Leave the man alone!" The woman I had helped tried to stand up for me.

"Shut up! Why are you defending him? Do you want a beating as well?"

They beat me with their fists and legs without stopping.

"You're running away from Ozren, *balija*! While we're being killed by your people, you're running away!"

I fell onto the ground and one of them hit me with the butt of his gun right on the jaw. From the sheer force he knocked out my teeth. Half conscious, covered in blood, I was crying out in pain.

"Now we'll kill you! You dog, get up!"

They pointed their guns. I stood up but fell again.

"Get up! Why are you shitting yourself! Die like a man!"

Suddenly, a car parked nearby. Covered in blood I could barely see, but I recognised the man in the uniform. In 1992, I had given him five thousand Deutsche Marks to rescue my son from a concentration camp, and then five thousand more later on to have him transferred to Tešanj.

"What are you doing, you gang of hooligans?!" he yelled.

"*Balija!* He ran away from Ozren, Commander, Sir!"

"And you've decided to play the judge! You want to shoot him?! Who are you here? We're creating a country, and a gang wants to sentence without a trial! He's coming with us, to jail!"He yelled at the sheepish guards.

They threw me into the car. Before we even left, I lost consciousness. **(III)**

(I) The letter Fadil Mujaković wrote to his brother Mesud who was living in Germany towards the end of 1995, at the time of the offensive of the Army of Bosnia and Herzegovina on Doboj from Ozren, was kept safe because Mesud felt it had factual value. Mesud was in Frankfurt at the time when he showed it to an old friend from the old Usora orchestra, the electrical engineer Anto Fačko, who was drawn to its almost literary qualities. He copied it out and kept a photograph of the original, which was written in small handwriting, page-to-page, on five full A-5 pages.

(II) The story is dedicated to the memory of the late Mustafa Hodžić, a great man and skilled football player of the team "Sloga" from Doboj. His flight from Ozren happened towards the end of all war operations in that area. The battle for Vozuća and Ozren was, in the three-and-a-half-year war conflict, one of the biggest losses for the Army of Republic of Srpska. For the duration of the war, the Army of Bosnia and Herzegovina had tried to establish important strategic communication between Tuzla and Zenica, in the valley of the river Krivaja, from Zavidovići towards Banovići, and further on towards Živinice and Tuzla. Thanks to good planning and execution, in September 1995, the units of the Second and Thirds Corps of the Army of Bosnia and Herzegovina managed to cut the "Ozren pocket". The action began from many different positions, and the heaviest blow in Vozuća was dealt by the military group led by "El Mudžahid", made up of foreigners, Mujahidin from Arabic countries and radical local Islamists who, after taking the territory on the 10th of September 1995, committed horrific crimes on the prisoners of war and civilians of those areas, most often by beheading them. Their ruthless cruelty had its epilogue in The Hague. Because of his oversight in stopping or punishing the cruel acts of the Mujahidin towards the wounded and captured Serb soldiers, the ex-commander of the Main Headquarters of the Army of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Rasim Delić, was sentenced to three years in prison. Towards the end of the war operations on Ozren, the army of Republika Srpska had around 6,000 soldiers, while the Army of Bosnia and Herzegovina had around 20,000, and as it was by far numerically more powerful, in just five days, in a sudden surge, they flew over numerous ditches and trenches and pushed the front lines back over 20 kilometres, right up to Kraljica peak, the highest peak on that mountain. The Serb population from around ten villages on Ozren fled to Doboj, which was then followed by a vengeful exodus ordered by the city of Doboj, when 1,500 civilians were forced to leave. They were the remaining Croats and Muslims, mostly women and the elderly, who had survived all the tortures of war, only to be thrown out of their homes at the very end. The military police firstly forcibly transferred them onto the stadium

of the football team "Sloga". They were then ordered to leave on foot, walking around 30 kilometres over Ozren to Maglaj, where they were taken in by humanitarian organisations and again pointed in the direction of Tešanj and Zenica. For most of them it would be a path of no return to their hometown. This is how, apart from the death toll of the military, the civilian population paid a heavy price for the military operations on Ozren. According to the book by Nenad M. Cvjetković "The Battle for Vozuća 1992-1995" (published by Grafičar, Doboj in 2012), for the duration of the three-and-a-half-year war, in the Ozren region, 1,008 soldiers of the Army of Republika Srpska died, and more than half of these deaths were in September 1995, while the Army of Bosnia and Herzegovina suffered casualties of 1,200 deaths and 495 wounded.

The complete truth of everything that happened on Ozren will be veiled by secrets for a long time to come. Conspiracy theories mention two intriguing variants. According to the first theory, after NATO's involvement in bombing Serb centres for communication at the beginning of September 1995 (400 fighter planes did around 3,500 flights and destroyed 150 strategically important infrastructural and telecommunications objects), the Army of Bosnia and Herzegovina had such wind in its wings that the re-taking of Doboj was expected in the near future. The units of the Third Corps were stopped at the entrance to the town, in Ševarlije, by "political commands" and threatened not to go any further, otherwise NATO would bomb their positions. The second conspiracy theory points out that the Serb side "sold" Ozren even before the deciding battle, because it had to renounce "excess" territories which had to fit the ratio of the peace treaty, 49:51 percent. Because of this, allegedly, Ozren wasn't assisted by the elite Serb forces, and immediately before the fall of Ozren, the workers had been sent to load up tow trucks of ammunition from the storerooms, to be sent to Derventa, so as not to fall into the hands of the Army of Bosnia and Herzegovina. With a bitter aftertaste for both sides feeling the futility of war and meaningless deaths, there is a suspicion that politics mixed itself up in the fate of Ozren and Doboj. After the Dayton Agreement was signed, the borders of the Federation and Republika Srpska were drawn out, which in this region not only divide, but with their unnatural divisions, threaten to facilitate new conflicts in the future.

(III) Ćazim Sarajlić had a nervous breakdown in September 1995. For a long time, he wasn't himself. It took a long time, and lots of care and attention from his wife, the late Muniba, for his health to get better, and for him to leave his nightmarish, psychotic state. Never again did he want to speak of what happened to him. Everyone around him knew that – but he kept quiet. We met

up in June 2018. He was in mourning, and in deep old age. He had lost his pillar, his son Reuf. Ćazim was 88 years old at that time. Many years had passed since his escape, but, I thought, things like that, especially with bright and lucid people, can never be forgotten. We were drinking coffee in the shade under the grapevine, in his yard, and spoke about anything and everything. There was a lot to learn and hear from Doboj's oldest carpenter. I tried to get him, in a roundabout way, to tell me about his time on Ozren. He rejected the conversation:

"I don't know what you're talking about. You've probably confused me with someone else. I've never even been on Ozren!"

I didn't insist, and then he asked me:

"How are you related to Franjo Jeleč?"

"He's my uncle," I replied.

"I knew him well. He was my colleague, an excellent carpenter. And a good man."

Word by word, he softened up, and so I found out about his war traumas via the carpenter line, thanks to my deceased uncle Franjo. The well-respected craftsman from Doboj, Ćazim Sarajlić, didn't live to see his story published during his lifetime. He passed away in Doboj on the 11th of November 2021, aged 92. "Flight" is dedicated to his memory, as well.

Destiny

Sasha was in the village with his grandmother Doma and grandfather Andrija the day the shelling started.

"People, they'll kill their own child!" cried the closest ones. "We have to get him out of here as soon as possible!"

Sasha's dad was a Serb and his mother was a Croat. In the past this wouldn't have stopped couples from enjoying a happy marriage and a pleasant life, but today shells were flying from dad's side, and it wasn't just the family that was concerned but also the newly formed army from his mother's home village.

"It wouldn't be right; it wouldn't be right at all if the child died on our side!" the commander said.

"Try and contact Doboj! Ask for someone to pick him up from Vila."

Sasha was fifteen. He liked it at his grandparent's place. He preferred staying in the village to the town. He loved nature, the forests, meadows, the green fields by the Usora river. He had made friends, his peers, and his uncles turned a blind eye to all of his mischief.

"No one is allowed to even touch Sasha!" They said as they hugged his young shoulders.

"I don't want to go anywhere!" He argued when he found out what their plan was.

"Nothing is going to happen to me! What happens to you can happen to me too."

"You must go, our darling!" Everyone was insisting; "See how they are targeting our village! You'll be killed by a grenade! You will be safer and better off in the town!"

Sasha left, sad, and with a broken heart. At Vila he was taken in by Karaga's soldiers and his relatives breathed a sigh of relief.

"As long as Sasha is in safe hands, that's all that matters. This child should be spared of all this madness!"

They thought the war would be over soon. They thought they'd see him again soon.

The war didn't stop. The shells started raining on the town too.

His mother Dragica was desperately wringing her hands.

"My darling son, take care of yourself!"

The day was clear and sunny. A girl from his building invited him out. They walked out of their building and towards the steps of their high school.

Without any warning, a grenade suddenly fell.

During the 1992-1995 war, from all the random shelling of the villages and towns, numerous innocent victims from all three ethnic groups suffered. In the municipality of Tešanj, 145 innocent civilians died, among which 18 were children. They were shot mainly by artillery, plane bombs, and "luna" rockets.

The Croat villages which today are mainly in the newly created municipality of Usora suffered a loss of 59 human lives taken by shelling from the Serb army. In Prisade, after the initial artillery attack, there was a "cleansing" mission in the already abandoned village where Serb forces killed 18 unarmed civillians, all over the age of 65.

In the Teslić municipality, 78 civilians lost their lives in a brutal way after being met by the forces: they were jailed, beaten, and shot at point blank range.

In the Doboj municipality, 99 civilians lost their lives through random shelling from the positions of the Bosnian Army and Croatian Defense Army.

All three sides saw hundreds wounded and disabled for life.

The most savage face of this last war was that war targets were equalised with civilian institutions and the civilian population. Not one of the commanders in charge has been legally held accountable for the ruthless shelling and massacre of innocent civilians.

The memories of the victims live in the hearts of their closest ones and in grim memorials, such as the one located in the north part of the city park in Doboj.

On the low erected pedestal there is a diagonal marble block. The letters are hard to read due to a poor choice in font, and the message is logically, aesthetically, and grammatically confusing. Instead of genuine sorrow and sympathy for the innocent victims, all Serbs, Bosniaks, and Croats, the text in Cyrillic looks as if it has been written by a pathetic national poet for political and hate-inciting purposes.

"To the Civilian Victims of the War in the Fatherland 1992-1995.
Blessed Souls, Victims of All Kinds of Evil
With Inhuman Howls of Hatred
That Have Populated a Constellation of Innocence
And That is Why
You Barbarians,

Must Walk Under the Cursed Stars
With Bowed Heads
Forever.
99 innocent victims and 399 disabled and wounded ones are also the most terrifying warning for future generations.
March 2000, Serbian People of Doboj"

The innocent victims are in fact a terrifying warning to future generations to never march towards war. We must indeed pass by execution sites with bowed heads and never forget where nationalism and brutal hatred of people of the same kind brought us.

There is no memorial with such a message!

The Bell

There are people who happily anticipate holidays, least of all for the travelling and lazing around; rather, they are eager to meet new people and forge new relationships. But he wasn't one of those, he wasn't inclined to small talk with strangers on a beach and every new acquaintance would take a while to become truly familiar. However, every rule has an exception, and Johannes Grassmayr was his exception. It happened in Baška Voda, exactly when the church bells started ringing twelve times, at noon, as he was considering where to have his lunch.

"Schöner Klang der Glocke!" started the man in German; however, the other man, due to his timid disposition and aversion to chatting with strangers on holidays, replied:

"Sorry, I am Canadian. I don't understand."

"Nice sound." The grey haired Austrian wasn't going to be taken aback, switching to English in an instant.

"All bells sound the same," mumbled the other man, in denial.

"But you are wrong, sir! Every bell is a unique musical and artisanal creation. This double-ringing one we can hear at noon is in the range of an octave, in D-sharp and F-sharp minor. Hear the divine torrent of sounds after the clapper hits, it reverberates a whole cascade of tones. The tonal spectrum of a bell is a joy for anyone's ears. People don't know that every time it rings it produces fifty partial tones!"

"Unbelievable! To me it just sounds like bang bang bang. A call to prayer – or lunch!"

"Forgive me, but I must laugh. Most people think along those lines. The bells ring for prayer and for lunch, but also for the beauty of their sound. The secret to every bell lies in its shape and the process of the craftsmanship. These partial elements bring the harmonics together and create unity of sound. After the acoustic, easily audible first clang of the so called nominal note in its long

lasting echo, we start to hear its lower octave, then prime, third, fifth, higher octave, octave and fifth, double octave, triple octave. Bells are indeed a gift from the heavens!"

He was fascinated by this expert in bells and their sound properties, and he could not have anticipated what was yet to surprise him! Step by step, he discovered how bells are made, with a lot of mathematics and calculations regarding their desired weight, tone and acoustic properties. He learnt about the traditional way of making them, from the double clay mould and bronze melted at 1,100 degrees Celsius, to the casting and long-term cooling process. The Austrian then quoted Schiller:

"*Even though the work may praise the Craftsman, still the blessing comes from above*[119]. It's true! In our workshop we always call for a priest to bless our bells before they are cast and we always pray for the Lord's mercy."

The man's mistrust of strangers eased away during the course of this pleasant and interesting conversation about something completely unknown to him before. They decided to go for lunch together. He had the honour of meeting one of the great masters, one of the brothers - owners of the biggest bell foundry in Europe, Grassmayr from Innsbruck. During the course of their conversation they arrived at a remarkable coincidence that seemed to have been coordinated by the heavens itself in this unusual connection between Tyrol and Bosnia.

"You were born in Canada?" asked the Austrian.

"No, actually I was born in Bosnia."

"Really? We have cast bells for some churches in Bosnia. Where are you from exactly, if I may ask?"

"I'm from a small town, north of Sarajevo, called Doboj."

"It is truly a small world! Our bells are ringing in your hometown!"

"Really?"

"Yes, really! During the war the Catholic church was destroyed in Doboj. The Grassmary Bell Foundry cast a bell as our charitable donation to the restoration of the church and relinquished any profit we might have had. Your bell rings in F- sharp minor!

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119 "Song of the Bell" by F. Schiller

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Ten days later he arrived, with a fine suntan, to the town where now no one would be waiting for him. He came to light candles on the graves of relatives and friends, and went to church to pay requiem masses to the deceased. The priest was young and friendly. He knew the man would be leaving quickly and that only his prayers would linger. The man asked him about the restoration of the church and about the bell.

"It's a long story," said the priest. "It is all recorded in the monograph of the parish. You can purchase the book if you're interested, and you can also, if you have time, take a look around the parish archives."

On the shelf he could see small white boxes, neatly dated. He opened the last one and a tiny A-5 diary tumbled out, as if it had been waiting to be opened. The cover was in a faded blue and the letters JŽ-ŽTP[120] Doboj were stamped in gold. Someone with neat handwriting had written in the diary with a blue fountain pen, showing no signs of smudges or corrections, clearly in line with the railway personnel's expectations. Dates were orderly noted, and there were small spaces between the dates and the written content. On the first page, approximately in the middle of the white sheet, it was written in large letters:

RECORDS OF THE ERECTION OF THE CHURCH IN DOBOJ[121]

In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. Amen.

My name is Mato Pinjušić and I worked for the railway company in Doboj. I have been retired for quite some time now. Destiny has chosen me to tell you this story about the bell, which is more like an account of the destruction of our church. Thanks to God's will, I was spared during the war and managed to survive. I wasn't into politics, and never carried on about my beliefs or nationality. I was 68 years old and I wasn't thrown into jail or tortured, but I lived through the terror of war alongside everybody else - experienced the looting, exposure of all manner of basest of human vices, murders, and expul-sion and persecution of innocent people. My son Marinko was captured and taken to a concentration camp in the Usora suburb together with his father in law, who was a Serb and who took his side, and who also didn't want to join the Serb

120 JŽ-Yugoslav Railways; ŽTP - Railway and Transport Company

121 See Endnote 1

army. Lord, forgive me for forgetting about the destruction of the sacred place that had stood here for a hundred years, but anguish for loved ones and pure fear took over. But what could I have done? Besides praying, locked away in my apartment with my wife Dragica, I didn't have anything apart from my faith and hope that my children would escape this hell, that the war wouldn't go on for long, and that we could restore our broken-down church.

I grew up with that church, alongside the altar. I received all the holy sacraments, got married, baptized my children, and went every Sunday to holy mass. I prayed from my heart and soul for good to come to my family, for my town, for my Bosnian homeland and for the church itself, Sacred Heart of Jesus.

The Catholic church was one of the oldest buildings in our town. With its age, one hundred years, it was a relic from the past. The building was erected in 1896, designed by the famous architect Josip Vancaš, and blessed by our first priest Petar Ajvazović, a great and noble man of Armenian descent. He is buried in the cemetery Bare. This man looked upon all men, regardless of religious beliefs or nationality, as equals. Thanks to his efforts, and of his parishioners, the church was completed in 1910.

I won't skip anything in this recounting. I believe in truth and in the merciful Lord. I am grateful for God's blessings and to divine providence for giving me my last burst of energy and health to faithfully write down everything that happened as it happened.

3.5.1992

I always enjoyed the early morning mass on Sundays. The whole day following the mass would be one of relaxation and joy, always like a public holiday, and all worries from Monday to Saturday would be somehow cleansed by that morning's holy prayer. But for the first time in my life, the early mass didn't bring peace to my soul. Throughout the whole previous night all of us could hear gunshots. The streets were blocked off and there were army barricades everywhere, so only about five believers made it to church that morning, putting their lives at risk. They didn't know that it would be their last mass for the next ten terrible years. The church bell didn't ring, as it was supposed to, for the High mass at 11 am. The armed soldiers barred the entrance to the church, and our priest, the Reverend Josip Kudić, was taken from his home somewhere. A police car with a megaphone drove through the

streets of the city. It called for residents to disarm, and meanwhile on the radio we heard that "Serbian Doboj had been 'liberated'". Major Stanković gave an ultimatum to inhabitants of the old part of town called Čaršija to hand over their weapons by four o'clock that afternoon. And at that exact time, even though there was hardly anyone to be found in the old town, artillery started firing from the direction of Lipac and Pridjel.

On the first day of what they called "liberation", on Sunday evening, our Catholic church was bombed and set on fire. Radio Doboj and "Glas komuna", the local newspaper, reported untruthfully that the church had "been destroyed in the gunfire of the battle operation"; however, there had been no battle operations. The Red Berets, Yugoslav National Army, and other Serbian paramilitary units were the only ones there! There had been no resistance, nor could there have been any. The bad guys were practising shooting at their targets! The first shell was fired from the direction of the shop "Borovo", by the edge of the city park, and killed the drunk, godless soul who had been the first one to shoot at the church. A mortar shell struck the tree above his head and killed the evil doer on the spot, but not even that sign of God's power and guidance could enlighten these darkened minds. Out of spite, others started firing. The church was damaged, but as if it purposely resisted, it wouldn't crumble. The next day, on Monday, 4th of May 1992, the "liberators" blew up the mosque near the fortress Gradina, and started shooting at our church at a closer range. At 5 pm, they shot the sacristy and the bell tower. The fir structure burst into flames and the whole building was on fire. The flames could be seen from the Fire Station, but the firefighters arrived on Tuesday - a day late - to put out the burning embers, to their shame, and to the shame of the army whose soldiers committed the crime in the name of their religion and created the state that they would name Republika Srpska.

The church didn't give in. The roof had fallen in, it was wounded and took many blows from shelling, but the bare walls were still standing. Everything had been burnt; the beautiful altar, the valuable paintings of Christ's redemption, one hundred years old. With God's grace the statue of Virgin Mary, Our Lady of Lourdes, somehow remained untouched. It was a miracle of God! The fire destroyed everything, and all we were left with was the statue of the blessed, smiling God's Mother. I hadn't seen a greater miracle. Praise to Thee, my Lord!

All of us who remained in the town had a curfew imposed from 8 to 11 am and during that period we went to see our church. There we found armed

soldiers who looked at us darkly and wouldn't let us approach. For the first time in my life I didn't cross myself in front of the church even though I really wanted to. They would've killed me there and then. I stopped, said a prayer in my mind, until I was hurried onwards, guns pointed at me.

13.5.1992

There is a curfew. We can come onto the street only from 8 to 11 am, to breathe some fresh air and buy some bread. I bumped into our local priest, Josip Kudić. We're sure he's being followed, so to avoid suspicion, we walk openly on the main street. He told me how the day before, the day of St. Leopold Mandić, was the hardest day of his life. At four pm in the afternoon, the soldiers came armed with axes to the convent where the nuns lived. They smashed everything there was to smash. The nuns were shoved into the parish office. Three men from the special forces, the Red Berets, followed them and started smashing the doors with the axes. They ripped off the priest's necklace bearing the cross and stomped on it. They smashed anything they could get their hands on: crockery, paintings, tapestries, furniture. One of them even raised his axe above the priest's head and asked him in a Serbian accent, "Would you like it, priest, for me to cut your head open?"

"Hit me if you really want to," the Reverend replied bravely.

The man wearing the red beret let him go after seeing pictures on the walls showing Serbian Orthodox priests. One of the pictures showed the Orthodox priest Dragan Terzić, who had pretended to be a great friend to our priest. He never came to see him, however, and never offered any kind of help.

"Do you know, priest, what kind of war this is?" asked one of the guys.

Our priest replied that he didn't know, but somehow it seemed like it wasn't like other wars.

"This is a war of Orthodoxy against Catholicism and that's why we're destroying everything that isn't Orthodox!" retorted the guy.

After their rampage and destruction, they headed to the exit, and the nun Melanija proved herself more than brave and asked: "Would you like something to drink? It is our custom to offer a drink to people who come to visit us or after a hard day's work at our place." They were confused and shocked by her question. When one of them regained his composure, he replied, "We don't drink while we're working! You have 24 hours to leave Serbian Doboj. This house of yours as of now is a Serbian house!"

The Reverend went to the Crisis Headquarters at ŽTP, where he was told by Boro Paravac, Mile Ivošević, Obren Petrović and Savo Krivokapić that they wouldn't press any charges against him, but if the army officials have ordered that he must leave, then he should do it the sooner the better. The priest was now desperate, almost in tears from bitterness and sadness.

The priest remained in Doboj for three and a half months more. They didn't throw him out straight away. Bearded and armed soldiers came to the door at his parish office eight times, showing their knives and bragging how they were beheading whoever they wanted to, and always with the excuse of searching for weapons or radio communications. The only reason they were there was only to steal and loot. They took almost everything while he was still in Doboj. The TV was long gone, and later on, another man pocketed the remote control – just in case he needed one. Reverend Marko Šalić from Dragalovci was arrested. He spent 62 days in Doboj jail and suffered daily beatings. He died a year later in Zagreb following complications from these beatings. Who knows how our priest would've fared if the Bishop from Banja luka, Dr. Franjo Komarica hadn't intervened. Two Serb officials, under the command of general Talić, took him to Banja Luka on the 5th of August 1992. Later on, he was transferred to Zagreb, and then moved as a refugee on to Baško Polje to live in a deserted army resort for the next four years.

15.10.1992

Our church has suffered another attack! It was blown up again. Despite all attacks, it stood defiantly and didn't give in. The strong skeleton of the Austro-Hungarian structure, the walls, the shattered bell tower, they all still remained. The church defended itself alone from the blind hatred of those who called themselves believers. The bell, weighing over a tonne, cast in Vienna, fell onto the remains, but it wasn't damaged. These people without human qualities, these robbers once again showed their greedy, evil faces...

20. 10. 1992

They came with an excavator and the "Progres"[122] truck. The bell tower had collapsed, but somehow – it was God's miracle - the bell weighing 1064 kilograms remained in perfect condition. They brought prisoners from the jail, Muslims and Croats. They made them clear the rubble of the destroyed

122 "Progres" was a company for maintaining and cleaning the urban environment.

building – its wooden beams and bricks - and hook the bell up to the bucket of the excavator with a metal pole.

Later on, while reading the newspaper "Bosnian Reporter" dated 10. 11. 1995, I discovered an article on page five, elaborating on this event: "After the first destruction of the church in August 1992, the bell tower wasn't yet completely collapsed, and the bell was covered by all the rubble. Then, ordered by Milenko Gligorić, spokesperson of the SDP[123] party in Doboj, Muslims and Croats - captives held in the Doboj jails, were brought into the garden of the church and forced to take out the bell weighing over a thousand kilograms. Two četnik soldiers threatened and abused them, demanding that they weren't even allowed to scratch it. Despite these threats, Gligorić insisted that they remove the bell and place it onto the truck where it would be taken to a place near the jail. This is where the bell stayed overnight, on the truck covered with a tarpaulin, and the next day it was taken to a warehouse of PTK[124], behind the main bakery in Doboj. There the hidden bell awaited its fate for ten days. Predrag Kujundžić, nicknamed Predo, found it and took it to the Zagreb Beer Brewery at Usora suburb. The bell waited there for a month, where it was discovered once again by Milenko Gligorić, who proceeded to steal it and hide it behind the school workshop at Usora suburb. The bell was supposed to be transported to Bijeljina where a new church was being built. Gligorić didn't intend to donate the bell; he wanted to sell it for 17,000 German Marks[125]. Nevertheless, the mystery of the bell didn't stop there. The bell was once again found by Predrag Kujundžić who stole it off Gligorić and drove it to Suho Polje where an Orthodox church was being built, named the Church of Saint Duja. It is important to note that Kujundžić was from Suho Polje and he was one of the biggest donors for the erection of this new church. Where he found the money isn't hard to figure out. And that is how the bell from the Catholic church in Doboj had its miserable odyssey. The beauty of its sound in its new home could never be matched to the sound coming from the bell tower of the Catholic church in Doboj which spread over the Doboj landscape.

19. 2. 1993

Our church was attacked again, for the third time! It was a thorn in their eye! They put so many explosives in the foundations of the building that the

123 SDP – Serbian Democratic Party

124 PTK – Agricultural-Trade Company

125 Currency at the time

detonation shattered the windows of buildings up to 800 meters away. This happened at 9 pm at night. The whole city was in fear. Even the Serbs were afraid; they thought the other side was attacking Doboj. I had no clue what was happening and only found out in the morning – our church was razed to the ground! I risked my life, I could've been shot then and there, but the morning after I had to go and see it for myself. The scene was horrific. From such a beautiful, sacred building, a place where all of us, Croats and our Serbian, Muslim friends went to listen to midnight mass on Christmas Eve together, all that was left was a pile of rubble, bricks, wood, metal and concrete. I couldn't believe my eyes: the great metal cross in front of the church still stood upright there. Even this last detonation which shook the whole city couldn't bring it down. Praise the Lord, great is thy mercy! But this insanity and hate have blinded so many.

19. 4. 1993

More excavators and trucks arrived by order of the highest officials to even out the terrain and delete our existence in this place. They loaded what was left of our church onto the trucks and took it to the landfill by the main highway between Doboj and Bosanski Brod. Eyewitnesses claim that they struggled to pull the cross off the plinth. Three times they tried to pull it onto the truck and each time it fell back down to the ground. It didn't want to leave its sacred place, the church yard! They wanted to destroy every visible trace and symbol of our faith and our existence. They used excavators to cover up the rest of the foundations, flattened the ground and planted grass. I wonder how many human crimes have been hidden the same way?!

It was unreal looking at the desolate wasteland where the church had once been. We, the few Catholics who remained, who weren't yet exiled from our homes and hearth, would always stop on the other side of the street, from the side of Pavlović Bank, and secretly cross ourselves.

1993 – 1995

In this period, the diary notes don't mention the church, but other war related events. Each of them deserves to be told. The author had written about a hundred pages in uneven handwriting, as if sometimes he was in a rush, or, which is more probable, in great fear of a knock on the door. The diary follows the "voluntary exodus" of his neighbours, the terror that the army held over

the civilians, the cut-off of electricity and water supply, shelling from the "free territory" which killed many innocent civilians in the city, and echoes of the war from the front lines: Putnik Hill, Makljenovac, Sivša, Matuzići, Vozuća, and the last expulsion of the remaining Croats and Muslims over the Ozren mountain. He also notes the media war propaganda, and the war in the souls of people who couldn't believe that those who used to be the loudest to proclaim Brotherhood and Unity could change overnight to become the loudest and most radical nationalists. The prayers in the book alternate between a few consistent prayers written by candlelight, inspired by hope that this war would one day end, because evil can't go on forever. And then when the war did finish, only one sentence was recorded.

21. 11. 1995

In the United States of America, they have signed the Dayton Peace Agreement which has ended the war and legitimized ethnic cleansing.

14. 4. 1996

After the Dayton Peace Agreement was signed, Doboj Parish was divided up between two entities[126] and four smaller municipalities: Doboj, Usora, Gračanica and East Doboj. The strangest part of this was the "border" in Makljenovac, where half the village belongs to the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the other half to Republika Srpska. In this very village, for the first time in four years, the second Easter mass was celebrated, but on a meadow! Their chapel had been destroyed, too. The altar was in a car trailer. Sister Melanija played the keyboard and the mass was led by our priest Josip Kudić who had returned from his refugee camp in Baško Polje. I met him on White Sunday in Doboj. He was brought by European observers and SFOR[127] soldiers. They didn't believe him when he told them that there used to be a Catholic church in the city(!?) The Serbs had denied its existence, so he took them to the place, now bare and overgrown with grass, to show them where it used to be. He asked if someone could supply them with a trencher to be able to show the remains of the foundations of the building which had been destroyed and flattened with machinery. They couldn't give him what he

126 They are: Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Republika Srpska

127 The Stabilisation Force (SFOR) was a NATO-led multinational peacekeeping force deployed to Bosnia and Herzegovina after the Bosnian War.

needed but it appeared that they realised that they had been misled by the locals, and that there really had been a Catholic church there. That's how one writes history! Five years had barely gone by, and already the past was being grotesquely rewritten – everything was distorted, subverted and deliberately forgotten. Lord, have mercy on these sinners!

The Roman Catholic Parish Office of the Sacred Heart of Jesus
Braće Jugovića 2
Bosnia and Herzegovina, 53000 Doboj

3. 5. 2000

To the Serbian Orthodox Church of the Zvornik – Tuzla Diocese, for the Bishop of Zvornik – Tuzla, Father Vasilije

I, the priest from Doboj parish, Jozo Kudić, am addressing you, your holiness, with a request for your help to solve some problems. It is regarding the bell from the Doboj parish church, which has been, I have heard, "donated" to the village Suho Polje near Doboj.

That bell would ring on the Catholic church in Doboj from 1896 and it didn't bother anyone. The gusts of war blew and the bell was taken from where it belonged, and the church was blown up. All that remains now is that bell. Unfortunately, it isn't in the parish it belongs to. I've heard that the locals in Suho Polje aren't overjoyed at the ringing of this bell as they have an inkling of how it got there. They would even prefer it if it was returned to the owner, and the owner is the Doboj parish. You have the authority to ask those who "own" it to return it to the Catholic church in Doboj. The second favour I beg of you is if you, as a respected authority, could ask of the local authorities in Doboj to return any remaining items from our archives or books taken from the church. Some of these items were saved as they were recognised as significant by certain people. They are currently in the Doboj museum.

We firmly believe that you are willing to assist us in our endeavours, and all of us here at the Doboj parish are deeply grateful for that. We still don't have a space in which to gather and pray, and we cannot hear the ringing of our bell that used to call us to our prayers.

Thank you in advance, and may the Lord guide you in your difficult and responsible service.

Upon returning from his exile, our priest Josip Kudić wrote to Orthodox bishop Kačavenda many times, insisting on, and requesting, the return of the bell. During the war the bell from the chapel in Grič, Makljenovac, had also mysteriously "disappeared". We later found out that the bell was to be found in Rudanka, in a newly erected church in Lužani, built in 1995, and consecrated by the Orthodox bishop Vasilije. Our priest never received a response to his letters.

On the webpage of the Serbian Orthodox church in the Zvornik – Tuzla Diocese, the newly erected church is described as falling within the Gračanica parish that consists of the town Gračanica and the villages Lendići, Upper and Lower Lohinja, Tekućica and Suvo Polje. There is even a picture of the church with a three-storey bell tower, and underneath the text says: "The temple of Raising of the Holy Cross[128] in the village of Suvo Polje on Ozren[129]. The temple is 19 x 9 metres. The construction started in 1993 and the foundations were consecrated in that same year by the Diocese of the Zvornik – Tuzla region, Father Vasilije. Construction was completed in 1997, and the temple was consecrated by the archbishop in charge, Father Vasilije on the 18th of October 1997".

Due to the Orthodox bishop's immoral and paedophile behaviours, he was "relieved of his duties" in May 2013. After a homosexual affair with a minor, he went into early retirement. In the middle of the scandal, the Orthodox bishop Kačavenda received the highest honours from Republika Sprska, the Order of the Republika Srpska, handed directly from the hands of the president, Milorad Dodik.

22. 9. 2000

Reverend Jozo Kudić, the priest from Doboj, chose the candidates to form the construction committee that would oversee the rebuilding of the church, parish house and parish facilities in Doboj. The members of the construction committee were: Mirko Zadro, Krešimir Zubak, Mato Pinjušić, Franjo Bilić, Ivo Čokljar, Rudolf Glazer and Drago Mišković. Merciful God, give us health and strength to complete this difficult task that lies ahead!

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128 Raising of the Holy Cross (Vozdviženje Časnog Krsta) is an orthodox holiday celebrating the day when Constantine raised the cross in Rome after overcoming Maxentius and thus beginning the domination of Christianity in the Roman Empire

129 A mountain near Doboj

7. 10. 2000

With joint effors, we have cleaned the area around the parish office building and the area where the church used to stand. The community response was satisfactory. Around fifty people helped out. We worked from ten am to three pm.

14. 10. 2000

Thirty volunteers turned up. We worked from 9 am to 3 pm to de-weed the garden. The cake shop "Turalić" sent us thirty meat pies (burek), thirty yoghurts, and thirty cakes as their contribution to this activity of volunteers. We were pleasantly surprised and thank them very much for that!

21. 10. 2000

We have covered the roof of the parish house and completed most of the fence with metal posts by pouring the cement into it. We had planned to complete this the following day but couldn't due to the sudden death of our priest Josip Kudić who died on the 21st of October at around 1 pm. On the 23rd of October 2000, there was a holy mass for the deceased priest held in Makljenovac, which was attended by around twenty priests and eight nuns. After the holy mass at 11 am, and having been seen off by a big crowd of parishioners, he was sent back to his hometown, Prozor, where he would be laid to rest. He was buried around 5 pm in his family grave.

Priest Kudić was a priest in our Doboj parish for 25 years. He was loved and dear to many, a real man of the people with whom we shared the good and the bad. To our great sorrow, he left without seeing his and our church rise again from the ashes. The parish was taken over in early 2001 by Reverend dr. Pero Brkić, the 14th priest in Doboj parish, who was originally from Bosanski Šamac. Thanks to God's blessing, the priest's persistence, and our help, we hope to begin the construction of the church next year.

In the Chronicle of the Sacred Heart of Jesus parish, dated 18th February 2001, it states:

I, dr. don Pero Brkić, born in Grebnica, in the parish of Hrvatska Tišina, municipality of Bosanski Šamac, born on 20. 9. 1958, agree to lead this parish of the Sacred Heart of Jesus according to the Decree of the Vrhbosna Ordinary from 18. 2. 2001. My service in this archdiocese is a small help (if that is what

it is) to this wounded church. The parish came out of the war in 1995 and the numbers of parishioners were decimated. There are about 4000 parishioners left - around 400 of them in Doboj, a few in Čaire. (No one from the previous 100 families in the village of Prisade, and no one from the 200 families from the village of Makljenovac). The process of villagers returning to Makljenovac began well, but then stopped in 2001 coming to around 100 families... I believe that the main factor to assist the return process would be the rebuilding of the parish church... The church was razed to the ground, the earth smoothed over, the roof over the parish house was removed and the parish house was looted. Everything had been taken out. The restoration was funded by the company "Zovko" from Žepče in autumn 2000. They installed new windows, doors and put the façade for the building. This was all thanks to Krešimir Zubak, a lawyer from Doboj and a high ranking politician on a national level in Bosnia and Herzegovina. From 2000-2002, he was the Minister for Human Rights to the Council of Ministers of Bosnia and Herzegovina. He was accompanied by the church members: Mirko Zadro, Mato Pinjušić, Ivo Čokljat, Drago Miškovic, Rudo Glazer, Franjo Bilić, Josip Krajina and Drago Krajina. They were the main go-getters for both the restoration of the church and return of parishioners, as well as parish community activities[130].

11. 3. 2001

After this terrible war, during which the church was completely destroyed, after eight years, nine months and ten days, for the first time we could celebrate the holy mass in Doboj! It was led by the assistant bishop of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Vrhbosna, dr. Pero Sudar. At the celebratory mass there were around 500 people gathered, from the city and the neighbouring villages, including fellow Muslim neighbours. The chapel in the parish house was too small to accommodate everyone, so the mass was held on the empty lot that used to be the site of the church.

12. 3. 2001

The request for the rebuilding of the church, made by the priest Brkić, was rejected by the Doboj municipality officials. The paperwork they requested made it seem like this was a completely new building that had never existed previously. Their response stated that "[the applicants] needed to obtain

130 See Endnote 2

urban planning approval for the construction of the object in question as well as the construction permit."

17. 3. 2001

Everyone knew, generations of people knew, that there had been a Catholic church in Doboj, and now we needed urban planning and construction permits, we have to prove its existence. In Doboj everyone is building whatever they want wherever they want, taking other people's land, and yet we are told that the church we are building isn't allowed to be an inch larger than the one they destroyed. That is why today, from 12:30 pm to 2:30 pm, an excavator has uncovered the foundations of the church for all the necessary paperwork proving the exact original length and width of the building that had been there for a hundred years.

20. 3. 2001

The priest Pero Brkić sent this report to the Roman Catholic Archdiocese Ordinaries of Vrhbosna:

The parish of the Sacred Heart of Jesus suffered great losses in the last war (1992-1995). Most of the parishioners were forced to exile, around 3500-4000 of them, and their property was seized, destroyed or completely annihilated. The priest was exiled as were the nuns. The last mass in the church of the Sacred Heart of Jesus in Doboj was led by priest Jozo Kudić to an audience of five or six faithful on Sunday, the 3rd of May, at 8 am (early holy mass). On that day, according to the bell ringer, the bell weighing 1054 kg was silenced. On that day the church (designed by architect Vancaš, the construction of which started in 1896 and was completed in 1910) was struck by incendiary ammunition and caught on fire. Since then the agony of this proud parish began, as well as the agony of its believers, its priest, its church, and its parish house. The church was later blown up (the exact date unknown). The bell fell onto the rubble and according to locals - Catholics, Muslims, and Orthodox - it was built into another sacred building of a non-Catholic confession. The organ was taken away. What was left of the church was blown up a second time and the explosion also damaged neighbouring buildings. Upon the blasting, the large metal cross remained intact in the front yard of the church. According to the testimony of an eye witness, a Muslim, the cross had to be flattened with a bulldozer and later on fell out of the truck three times before it was taken to the

rubbish tip by the motorway Doboj-Brod. The debris of the church was collected and taken away, the land flattened, the foundations covered up and hidden. The parish house was torn down, without a roof, windows, or doors. The recovery and return of the locals began slowly and gradually a few years after the war ended. The return of locals has been so far relatively successful. Up to today, according to the records from last Christmas made by don Ante Jelić the Archdiocese treasurer, 500 parishioners have returned...

16. 7. 2001

We have received the construction permit from the Doboj Munipality to build a new church in the same location where the destroyed church used to be.

18. 7. 2001

The first day of construction and rebuilding of the church of the Sacred Heart of Jesus in Doboj. The church is being built according to the same dimensions of the previous one. The old church was consecrated in 1910 during the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and had a bell weighing 760 kg, which was requisitioned by the army during the First World War. After the First World War, they acquired a new bell, the one we have again lost during this war. The patron saint of the church had been St. Kristina up until 1935. After that year she became the second patron, and the Sacred Heart of Jesus became the first patron of the church.

12. 8. 2001

The Archbishop, the esteemed cardinal Vinko Puljić, blessed and laid the foundational stone for the construction of the church in Doboj.

From the chronicles of the parish: "The first holy mass on the newly laid foundations of the The Sacred Heart of Jesus was led and celebrated by the esteemed cardinal Vinko Puljić. That day the foundational stone was consecrated. The Godfather of the foundational stone was Ivica Zovko from Žepče, the owner of the "Zovko"company. The construction was done by the company "Inter" from Matuzići, Doboj South, owned by Šemso Ahmić (the workers were Muslim and one was Serbian Orthodox). They will also put the slanting foundation of the church. Then the "Tadić" company from Žepče will take over the construction as they designed the church as well. The owners of the company are Vlado Tadić and Ljuba Tadić. The main architect is Ruža

Dunđer, maiden name Pranjić, from Žepče, and she works for the office "Tadić-Žepče". It is important to mention the company "Grading" from Doboj and the structural engineer Obrad Radić. The *eminence grise* of architecture and construction engineering in Doboj, Mr. Bojanić, a Serb from Herzegovina and an employee of "Doboj-Invest", benevolently looked at and checked the project documentation in the audit procedure. The head of urban planning was Brane Garić, a Serb, who had a polite, diplomatic and sensible approach when he approved the urban planning and construction applications. Three officers, whose names I don't want to mention, considered it imperative to frighten the priest, to abuse and disparage him, and to make it known that this is Serbian land and a Serbian town. Their desire, or fear, to appear to others or to themselves as bigger Serbs than it was necessary, was wisely bypassed by the Mayor, Dr. Nikola Gavrić, who showed civility, refinement and correctness in relation to this project.

29. 10. 2001

Marko Andrijanić, parishioner and former church minister who today lives in Switzerland, promised to donate 400 meters of ceramic tiles for the floors and two front doors for the church. He also donated a sum of one thousand German Marks for the construction of the church. Donations for the construction of the church are coming from all around the world. It's impossible to count them all. To this day we have four hundred donors. Whoever either we or the priest have contacted regarding donations has responded positively, either through donations, volunteer work or by supply of goods. Those who can afford to send a lot are the biggest donors; however, the small help of 20 Bosnian Marks, regularly set aside from our retired patrons' insufficient monthly pensions, is extremely touching.

30. 10. 2001

Twenty-two thousand pieces of "biber" tiles for the roof have arrived, a donation from the Archdiocesan Seminary in Travnik. The tiles were unloaded with a forklift and there were 41 pallets.

1.11.2001

A cross for the bell tower for the church was brought from Austria. Donors are the Jukić brothers who work in Austria but who come from Žepče. The designer of the cross is the "Tadić" company from Žepče.

1.12.2001

At 12:30 we completed the concrete works and bricklaying of the church tower. The next step is to complete the roof of the tower.

1.2.2002

From 9 to 10:30 am, thirteen parishers transported 300 "biber" tiles to a location where it would be convenient to access them for the tiling of the roof. Between 12 and 1 pm, workers from the "Tadić" company based in Žepče lifted the cross and placed it onto the top of the bell tower where it belongs. The cross is made out of a non-rusting metal, weighing 80 kg, 300 cm long, and the length from the top of the cross down to the ball is 260 cm.

20.2.2002

From 9 to 11:30 am, twenty-two parishioners volunteered in lifting three thousand tiles to the attic where the tiles would be placed on the roof above the sacristy and the altar. We call this the little roof, where the preparations for tiling have been completed (we already placed: the beams that are laid around the perimeter of the load-bearing walls – also called rims, as well as rafters, laths, insulation, and the tinsmiths finished with tinsmith works).

9.3.2002

The bell arrived from Innsbruck, Austria at 2:25 pm. The truck operated by "Caritas" Diocese in Sarajevo also brought three clocks that would be built into the tower along with the bell. The bell weighs about 800 kg. The bell was carefully taken out of the truck by hand and placed inside the church by 3:45 pm. Seven workers worked on this operation for three hours.

17.3.2002

The parish Chronicle: "The blessing of the bell, weighing 760 kg, strike note F sharp, the company "Grassmayr-Innsbruck" and the first holy mass in the newly covered Church of the Sacred Heart of Jesus in Doboj will be led by the esteemed cardinal Vinko Puljić on Sunday, 17. 3. 2002. Two days before St. Jacob's Day, the church had windows and doors, a roof and a bell tower, and the bell. There were about one thousand believers in attendance at the holy mass. It was the fifth Sunday of Lent (Passion Sunday) that brought

us the ringing of the bell. On the bell the inscription reads "Sacred Heart, our peace and our salvation, have mercy on us!"

From this day forth, the bell rings three times to hail Virgin Mary: at 7 am, 12 pm, and 7 pm; furthermore, before the holy mass at 6 pm every weekday it rings once, and on Sundays three times.

From the diary of Mate Pinjušić: At 4 pm, the mass was led by the Archbishop of Vrhbosna, the esteemed Cardinal Vinko Puljić, who blessed the interior of the church and he consecrated the water that later the priest Pero Brkić would use to consecrate the bell. The cardinal then turned on the circuit that would turn the bell on and let it ring after ten years of silence. The church was packed and we all cried. After ten years of suffering, our bell is ringing again!

23. 3. 2002

The construction and installation of the lightning protection rod on the roof has been completed. The construction company "Tadić" had to leave the site as we don't have enough funds for further work - the rendering of the walls in the interior of the church. At the moment we owe 50,000 KM for the work that has been done so far. They won't continue with their work until we pay them what we owe. The holy mass is still held in the church despite the interior being incomplete; however, it is important that the church is covered with the roof. The chapel at the parish house is too small for us all to fit in it – that's how many of us are in Doboj now!

25. 12. 2002

The first midnight mass after 11 years in the newly built church. Around 500 attendees. The local authorities have decorated the main street and lit it up for Catholic Christmas Eve. The municipality of Doboj has donated KM 10, 000 and a benefactor from Germany has donated Euro 1, 500. The Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina has donated construction materials, including a tow-truck of tiles. Thus, the priest has settled all debts to the construction company "Tadić" from Žepče and the company can continue the work on the church with new duties.

10. 3. 2003

The construction company "Tadić" has started plastering and has begun the interior decoration of the church. (It was completed around the end of May).

14. 5. 2003

Sad news: Today Mirko Zadro died in Doboj. He was a respected citizen, a good man, and an excellent tradesman. He was one of those who chose to stay in Doboj during the war, no matter the threats. Together with his father, old Stjepan Zadro, they were herded onto buses in August 1992 and taken to the dividing lines where they were asked if they would voluntarily leave, and thus be exchanged for someone else. They said "no" and went straight back to Doboj. He didn't want to be anywhere else but in Doboj! Only he was aware of the extent of his suffering, but a dead mouth can't speak. Mirko Zadro worked for Caritas during the war, and later on was an active member in the process of reconstruction and restoration of our church.

12. 6. 2003

Today marks the end of the carpentry work in the church. The pews were made by Emil Kaser, a parisher from Doboj, and all the other carpentry was done by Franjo Jeleč, a carpenter from Makljenovac. The work was finished at 7 pm. Five minutes later, around twenty women arrived to clean the church long into the night to avoid working on St. Anthony's Day, the 13th of June, and for it to be ready for Saturday, the 14th of June, when the Confirmation Mass was scheduled. Fourteen people are to be confirmed: five from Doboj, seven from Makljenovac, one from Gračanica, and a little girl from Prisade.

28. 9. 2003

Today the priest Dr. don Pero Brkić has said goodbye to his congregation and asked the parishers to pray for him and for the new priest, the Reverend Josip Senjak. The handover was scheduled for the 3. 10. 2003. Our priest Pero is leaving for a new role that has been offered to him. He has been named the director of Caritas of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Vrhbosna. I have spent countless hours with him worrying about and organising activities in regards to the construction of the church. His contribution is immeasurable, and thanks to his agility we managed to achieve a lot – a real miracle - in such a short space of time. We will all remember him dearly! During his last mass, he said: "I am handing over this parish to a young, active, and competent son of the Derventa region, but who completed his schooling here in Doboj. May God bless him in his duties, as he has been blessed up to now in his responsible duties".

The new priest, Reverend Josip Senjak, the fifteenth priest to hold this position in Doboj, also left a remarkable contribution behind him.[131] He commemorated the 110th anniversary of the Doboj parish by researching and publishing a monumental 600 page coloured monograph outlining the history of the church in Doboj.

20. 8. 2004

The parish has contracted the company "K-project" from Žepče to complete the exterior of the church. It was completed by the end of October. The garden was completed by the end of the year, seedlings planted and grass sown. This was done by the company "Pasiflora" from Teslić. The church was also connected to the district central heating supply, and the exteriors were lit up. The following year the church acquired a new loudspeaker, and before the consecration of the church, the lighting was complete – Katarina and Rudolf Glaser donated 3000 Euros for the chandeliers.

From the parish chronicle, written by the priest Josip Senjak: *The fact that the parishioners, as well as other good people, under the leadership of the hardworking priest Brkić, in such a short period of time managed to renew the parish church can be considered a small miracle and evidence of divine providence. The role of the building committee is especially worth noting... The list refers to the period from the arrival of priest Brkić to the consecration of the church on the 24th of April 2005. In this period, a total of KM 400,000 was collected and invested mainly in the renewal of the church (a part of the sum was invested in renewing the parish house). If we also take into consideration donations in goods, we can say that the construction and renovation of the parish centre cost around half a million KM. Although from the perspective of the society we live in it is hard to believe in much simpler things, we have no right not to believe that one day someone will have to repay and reimburse the Church and the people for that amount. The church in Doboj, as elsewhere, didn't collapse due to the weather conditions, it wasn't even on the frontlines. It was destroyed in the centre of the city that was run by some kind of governing body, both the military and the state authorities. We know that until the day comes when we will be compensated and reimbursed for our loss, and many of the church stolen possessions returned to our parish, lots of water will flow through the rivers Bosna, Usora and Spreča, but we shouldn't*

131 See Endnote 3

deny this right, for many reasons. One of them is for our donators. To repair the greatest damage that has been done to us, the damage to the living church, is on us![132]

3. 2. 2005

The new bell of our Catholic church rang today for a sad occasion. It resonated to "one side" only. One of the most well-respected members of our parish passed away. This news was published in the Chronology of important events in the book "110 Years of the Doboj Parish, from 1896-2006" on page 487.

"Mato Pinjušić has died. Shortly after, his wife Dragica died as well. Ten people have died in less than two months!"

Every day the church looks nicer, but the number of attendees is falling away. The burden of years, disease, and effects of the war is showing itself. The good soul, hardworking, unpretentious Mato left quietly, giving his best for the renewal of the church, and didn't make it to the celebration, holy mass and consecration of the church. Six months later a billboard appeared in Doboj displaying the church (in colour) and its interior. In large red letters was written:

On Sunday, the 24th of May 2005, at 11 am (feast day of St. Kristina, co-patron of the church), the Roman Catholic Parish of Sacred Heart of Jesus, Doboj, invites you to a CELEBRATION FOR THE CONSECRATION OF THE NEWLY BUILT PARISH CHURCH and first day marking the events celebrating the 110th anniversary of the parish (1896-2006)

The holy mass celebration and consecration of the church will be led by the esteemed Vinko Cardinal Puljić, archbishop of the the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Vrhbosna

In the cultural events the following organisations will be participating: Cultural and Artistic Societies "Izvor" Žabljak-Usora, "Deletovci", Croatia, "Usorski običaji" Sivša-Usora and "Viteški akordi" Vitez. WELCOME!

At the celebrations, aside from cardinal Vinko Puljić, there were twenty priests and around 2000 believers and other guests, among them officials: Ivo Miro Jović, Chairman of the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Josip Vrbošić, the Croatian ambassador in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Anto Čičak,

132 See Endnote 4

the mayor of the Usora municipality, Jozef Atijas, a representative from the Jewish Cultural Centre and the synagogue in Doboj, and Bajro Effendi Džafić, the main Imam in Doboj. The event was televised by seven different TV channels and all the daily newspapers wrote a report or article about the event the next day. One could see tents erected to the left and right of the church where the refreshments were served following the festivities.

No one came to celebrate from the Orthodox church, the Doboj Diocese archbishop, or from the Doboj municipality.

They didn't even send a congratulations card.

1) Mato Pinjušić kept a diary recording his personal account of the destruction and renewal of the Catholic church in Doboj. His original text is kept in the archives of the Parish Church Sacred Heart of Jesus in Doboj. Parts of that extensive text are incorporated in their original format in this text.

2) The Parish Chronicle is an independent archival document which contains mostly records sent from the parish to the Archdiocese Ordinaries of Vrhbosna.

3) Josip Senjak:"110 Years of the Parish in Doboj 1896-2006" Excerpt from page 607. Publisher the Roman Catholic Parish Sacred Heart of Jesus Doboj, 2009. Catalogued publication of National and University libraries of Bosnia and Herzegovina, in Sarajevo.

4) In the parish monograph there is a list of names of people who gave the biggest donations for the construction of the church. The largest amount on that list is the amount collected by the Committee for the renewal of the church: KM 45,000; finances sourced in many group initiatives and parish fundraisers: KM 30,000; Doboj Municipality KM 26,690; charity collected at three masses in January 2004 in a Croatian Catholic Mission in Vienna near KM 20,000; Godfather of the foundation, Ivica Zovko KM 18,500; finances from the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Vrhbosna around KM 17,000; Marko Andrijanić KM 12,000; Parish of St. Joachim and Anna in Rome, KM 12,000; Butto, Giuseppe and Alberto Bonifacio; A. R. PA Pescate Lecco KM 10,690; Federal Ministry for Refugees KM 9,353; Rudolf Rudo and Katarina Glazer KM 9,170; priest Pero Brkić KM 8,473; Government of Republika Srpska KM 8,000; Tadić in Žepče, KM 7,400; Landeskirche, Arau KM 6,458; Petar Franje Zubak KM 3,130; his holiness Vinko Radić KM 3,000. This list also includes five biggest donations in goods: "Ćosićprom", Usora: for the construction of the roof; Bero Jukić and brothers from Žepče: the cross on the belltower; "IGM" Visoko: brick mounts, 3, 400; KSC "Petar Barbarić", Travnik (Mons. dr Pero Pranjić): "biber" tiles 22,000 pieces; Ministry for Displaced Persons, Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina: 14, 400 bricks and 13 tonnes of iron.

On the Train Tracks

We were on a seemingly endless path, facing train tracks that went on for many kilometres. The tracks were polished from the weight of hundreds of trains that had until recently passed this way, now glistening in the sunshine, following the river Bosna on its path. The distance from Rječica Donja to Bijela Ploča is not small, walking track by track, but one can go without fear of trains; the metal carriages that went from Doboj to Maglaj hadn't been running for a whole month. There is no train to fear, but a greater threat is lurking. It is wartime, and after being searched by that bearded man, we were now on no man's land.

We're fleeing Doboj!

Ever since I heard the announcement on the radio that Doboj was "liberated", I couldn't sleep peacefully anymore. They started searching people's homes, abusing, and looting. Our food supply dwindled, and the fear of starving to death or being killed became more and more likely.

"I can't do this anymore," I said to my husband.

We discussed it every day, weighed our options and our chances of escaping this hell, from this "liberated" prison.

How to escape? How to safely leave? Where to go with our small children?

"I'm going to lose my mind!" I told him. "I have to take the children out of this, no matter what, to make sure they're safe, to make it more bearable for you too!"

My husband nodded. He agreed that we had to try something.

I had heard from the local gossip that the only way to leave was in the direction of Maglaj, along the train tracks.

I received permission and a pass to leave the town. In my small backpack I packed nappies, a few bits and bobs, a dummy and a bottle of milk, and in another small bag my own and my children's clothes. The local bus went through Pridjel and Ševarlije to Rječica, by the old road, to the right of the

river Bosna. We were lucky – that day would be its last journey as the line was cancelled due to the ever unfolding war circumstances.

We were told: "When you leave the bus, and if they let you keep going, then you have to continue on foot along the tracks. When you pass the dividing frontline, you may find a bus waiting for you on the other side, but probably not. Keep walking until Maglaj, it's not too bad, about ten kilometres away.

I'll walk to the end of the world if I need to save my children, I thought to myself.

At the time Selma was two and Damir was four. They were too young to understand what was going on, but old enough to feel our fear and anxiety. We weren't alone. And similar to us – five or six other women tried to escape with their children the same way. When we got off the bus, it was instantly obvious that we weren't from there. The Serb soldiers at the checkpoint could see this as well. One of them was large and hairy, a walking beard, on his head a fur cap and a cockade[133]. His chest was covered with two crossed automatic gun cartridge belts.

I was carrying Selma on my chest, while holding Damir's hand in my left hand. In my right hand I had the bag which the Chetnik instantly confiscated to rummage through.

"What is in your backpack?" he asked.

"Nothing! Just some things for the children."

He withdrew a long knife from his belt. My hands started shaking from this frightening gesture. He raised his knife and started stabbing my backpack. Once at the top and once at the bottom.

"Keep moving," he mumbled.

My legs felt as if they were made of wood, frozen from panic and fear. In front of us, our group of women and children, the tracks went on into the distance, eventually blending into the horizon.

We were on no man's land, on the dividing frontline, between two enemy fires. All alone! We were all well aware that someone could easily start shooting us from the forest nearby. No one would ever know what had happened to us. Our fear made our eyes bigger. With two small children, my steps weren't quick or nimble.

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133 both symbols of Serbian military tradition from previous world wars worn by Chetniks

At one moment something appeared on the horizon. It was moving.

"Someone is heading towards us!" exclaimed a woman who was walking in front of me.

"You must be imagining it," replied another who was behind me.

There was no doubt about it; the dot was moving towards us. We started to get overcome by panic again. Now we had nowhere to go! To the right was the river Bosnia with a steep shoreline, and on the left, there was a thick, impenetrable forest. The dot moved closer. We saw there was more than one body. Were they soldiers?

Who else could it be, here, in the middle of nowhere, other than armed soldiers?

With every step our fear rose but now there was no escape. We had to face our destiny.

We could see the dot falter in its steps. We stopped as well. After a moment of indecisiveness, we kept going, towards each other, almost at the same speed.

Soon we saw that they weren't in uniform; they weren't soldiers!

After a few more steps we could see that they weren't carrying weapons.

The image became sharper: we could see children amongst them.

A few more steps and the picture was clear: women and children were heading towards us!

We were in disbelief! Relieved, but we kept our steady pace.

We stopped to say hello.

"Good day!"

"Good day!"

"Where are you coming from?"

"From Doboj"

"And you?"

"From Maglaj"

"How is it in Doboj?"

"It's not good!"

"How is it in Maglaj?"

"It's not good in Maglaj either!"

We don't say anything, but they know we're Muslim women. We don't ask but we know they're Serbian. We're all unfortunate women and mothers fleeing to save our children from evil.

Here, on the second railway track, in the valley of the river Bosna, at the checkpoint of our meeting, we faced the full absurdity of this war.

"Good luck to you! Keep going, they won't harass you at Bijela Ploča!"

"Good luck to you too! They won't harass you at Rječica either!"

We kept going with heavy hearts; step by step on the deserted train tracks towards Maglaj.

In the spot where we had our brief meeting, the land was still divided.

The story was based on true events: however, the details and the dimensions of fear and depression that forced this woman to make the choice to leave Doboj, are simplified. In the first version, the names were the same, and then, on the insistence of this mother who now lives in a European country and who secretly wishes she can return to her home town (this is the reason why despite their comfortable lives in their adopted country they never renounced their Bosnian and Herzegovinian citizenship), the names have been changed to protect, and hide, the identities of all involved. Her words, however, shouldn't be hidden.

"To me, the 26th of May 1992 was one of the saddest days of my life, and because of the fear and enormous responsibility I felt having to take my children to safety, one of the most difficult, if not THE most difficult day in my whole life."

The meeting of the two different groups of women who were travelling in opposite directions, with the same concerns and fears, and with the same goal of taking their children out of harm's way, is the most vivid image of the meaninglessness of war and the burden that women and mothers, regardless of their religious beliefs or national identity, had to carry on their shoulders and in their hearts.

Contraception

"Here is our Stojan! Make us two coffees, will you nurse!"

"I'm afraid we don't have any sugar, doctor!"

"Make it without the sugar then! Our lives are bitter anyway, couldn't be more so!"

"How are you Stojan? When did you arrive from Belgrade?"

"Last night, doctor. I thought it would be best to bring you the things so they were ready in the morning. I thought you might need them today?"

"I will, for sure, Stojan! I'll need them right away! How was the journey here?"

"Very trying, my dear doctor. The special passage is still very unsafe. We had to take an old country road, even over some fields, and it was worst in Sremska Rača - as if we were thieves, waiting for their mercy to let us over the border. And every time I go there and come back here, we pass at least five or six checkpoints. They go through our paperwork, look into all of our stuff, take whatever they can – usually cigarettes. I used to buy ten cartons. They find them no matter where I hide them! I'm happy if I'm left with one or two packets."

"What can you do, Stojan. Nowadays even the non-smokers are smoking."

"That's right, and everyone is always asking me for a cigarette. And a packet costs ten German Marks! And they're all wondering how come I didn't bring more from Belgrade, seeing as I'm always travelling back and forth. They don't know that it's not easy. I go at least twice a week to Serbia, driving the wounded to VMA[134] in an ambulance vehicle. If we're late sometimes we sleep over at a cousin's place – he has a house in Belgrade's suburb Miljakovac. I really don't want to drive in the middle of the night through the special passage. If there is still daytime left, usually we drive straight back that same

134 VMA stands for Military Medical Academy

day. I barely get to buy anything. If I hadn't made that deal with the lady from the pharmacy, I wouldn't have time to bring these with me either!"

"Did you call them?"

"No. They knew I'd be there to pick the things up. The first time I got them for you I wasn't even sure if they'd have it at the pharmacy. I stopped at Banjica[135] in a side street near the Boulevard of Freedom, it was just on the way, and I hopped out of the car to ask if they had the things. The lady at the counter was a sweet brunette, smelling strongly of perfume and wearing a lot of make-up, and under her white pharmacist garments, she was dressed in the latest fashion. She had seen me park the car. I was all nervous, trying to figure out how to say it, and she said to me, all cheerful and witty, "Are you in such a rush now that you have to come in an ambulance?"

I was embarrassed; usually women bought these things.

"Dear nurse, in Bosnia it really is an emergency!" I said.

She laughed and opened a drawer. "We only have three IUDs."

"Give me all three!"

I thought it would be something bigger, but it was like a twig wrapped in cellophane.

"Could you order more of these, so I can pick them up when I come back again?"

She realised I wasn't buying them for myself, what would I need so many IUDs for?

"I'm assuming you need them for your practice?" she asked.

"For the hospital and the practice. In Bosnia now we need everything and don't have anything!"

She said she'd order more for next time. And she kept her promise! Now I am the best customer."

"Stojan, you were born to be a business man!"

"Trust me, doctor, it is better for me to smuggle contraception than cigarettes! I emptied a metal box that looks like a First Aid Kit, and put all the IUDs in there. The box is under the passenger's seat. The box has been opened a hundred times at the check points but they never have a clue what it is, they think it's something that is supposed to be in an ambulance. They don't ask me

135 Banjica is a suburb in Belgrade where the Military Medical Academy is situated

anything, they say you're right to go. I've stopped smuggling cigarettes, but to avoid suspicion, I buy one carton and take it apart. If they need to take anything, they can take a pack or two. Contraception is more important to me!"

"So cunning! Well done! What would we do without you?"

"I'm sure you'd find another way. If it wasn't me, it'd be someone else."

It is summer, the season of holidays. We're sitting on the terrace of the hotel that now has a different name. Over the last thirty years, everything in this town has changed; the streets, the people. Even Stojan has changed, his hair is completely silver, his moustache streaked with white, only his smile has stayed the same.

"This is a true story then?" I asked him, not fully believing what he'd told me.

"Couldn't be more true. That was the easiest money I'd made. Thanks to those IUDs, I made tens of thousands of German Marks!"

Stojan was always spirited and full of vigour. He always made me laugh.

"I've known you for so long, and never had a clue you were a war profiteer!"

"That was just how it happened! The doctor and I were both war profiteers. We made money thanks to, if you'll excuse me, the pussy: I bought IUDs for ten German Marks, sold them to the doctor for a hundred, and then he would insert them in for two hundred."

"Was there really such a high demand?"

"It was the war! You didn't know what tomorrow would bring. No normal woman wanted to fall pregnant! And there were affairs going on, like you wouldn't believe! Husbands on the front lines, all of us living in fear of death which could greet you at your front door at any moment, or a grenade – BANG – and then everything is all over. But the body wants to survive, seeks pleasure. Didn't we learn what mister Freud said about Eros and Thanatos while we were at school? It was a duel between two enormous entities within – love and death, it was an unavoidable struggle. Only Eros could stand up to war, hate, and violence.

"I think you've gone a little bit over the top there!"

"Maybe I have, I'm not a psychiatrist, I only know that during the war people were banging more than ever! And my IUDs helped. And everything was under control!"

Merciful

It was cold in the room. Wrapped up in her blanket she watched the flickering candle, kissed the cross and began to pray ardently. Her fingers were chilled to the bone while she half whispered the prayer and fingered her old rosary bead by bead, the only heirloom passed on to her after she was orphaned when her mother died prematurely. This is how her day began and ended, filled with fear, all the while secretly hoping this war would soon end.

But it didn't end. Every day it got worse! Whenever she felt overwhelmed by despondency her prayers became more earnest.

"If only I could go to church," she thought. "It would make things more bearable." Every morning she would wait for the hour when the church bells would ring. Since she had retired, she had never missed a single morning mass. However, there was no more bell ringing, nor was there a church; all that was left was a morning mass in her heart and in the silence of her room. She knew by heart all the prayers in the book, and the order they were in. She had never skipped the rosary prayer to the Blessed Virgin Mary and every time she would mention the aim that she prayed for:

"Lord, great and merciful, give us strength and sense, love and pity so that this war will end and peace will reign among people."

Then she would cross herself and pray, "Jesus, this is for Your love, to illuminate the sinners, and as a compensation for the damage they are doing to our holy and immaculate Mary's Heart."

While holding the rosary, she would recite the Apostle's Creed, and then, holding the first bead would recite with a humble prayer to Our Father, all the while looking into the distance, followed by three Hail Marys on the next three beads.

Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with Thee; blessed art Thee among women and blessed is the Fruit of Thy womb, Jesus. Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death. Amen.

The candle's flame kept flickering. It reached her soul.

The prayers went in a circle; by the palm of her hand the fingers worked their way through the beads, counting fifty beads, five-tens, fifty prayers, five prayers to Our Father, fifty Hail Marys, five holy mysteries. Five times she would submissively whisper:

"*My Jesus, forgive us our sins, save us from the hellfire, bring all the souls to heaven, and especially the ones who are in most need of Your mercy!*"

Earlier, when her church hadn't been demolished yet, she would always deposit a small banknote into the closed box next to the front doors, take the "Glas Koncila"[136], and also her favourite magazine, "Dobri pastir"[137]. She had already started making notes of the prayers she found most beautiful and inspiring into a small notebook with narrow lines. She now turned to those notes looking for hope, and endlessly repeated, "O Lord, free us of the plague, hunger, and wars."

There was one prayer that stood out amongst the others. When her spirit subsided she found it in her notebook and read aloud:

"*Constant battles, greed, and envy are leading this world to dark depths. Every day, O Lord, I hear of war, hatred, and intolerance of one another. Don't allow, dear Lord, the innocent to perish because of greed that is ruining our humanity, because nothing in this world is worth more than man. And you know, Lord, that during wartime many die for the wrong and unimportant reasons. Children are left without parents, alone and deserted. People wander along the streets searching for their dead in the rubble of their homes. Drive away evil from people's minds. You won in the war over Satan. Win, oh Lord, in any war amongst people. Plant peace and a wish to end this bloodbath in their hearts, because, Lord, the innocent are dying, and I believe You can change this. For Christ, our Lord. Amen. Our Father...*"

That was the last prayer in her "prayer book". Suddenly the thought came to her, at once, as an epiphany; she would use this prayer book every day as her personal diary – letters to sister Alma, the nun!

After the evening rosary prayer to Holy Mary by candlelight, with her neat handwriting she began recounting and writing out her days. She considered this an important task! Every day she recorded filled her with

136 "Glas koncila" is the Catholic paper ("The Council Voice")

137 "Dobri pastir" is the Catholic paper ("Good Shepherd")

empathy, feeling for another and their own misfortune, and this is how she arrived at her inner peace – her prayers had been answered!

Our Father,
Who art in heaven,
Hallowed be thy name;
Thy kingdom come;
Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses,
As we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation,
But deliver us from evil!
Amen.

18/10/1992

It is Sunday. It is warm; the southern wind is blowing. For fifteen days we haven't had electricity or water. It is hard, but we are living in the hope that this too will pass. Last Thursday I received my monthly pension for the eighth month of the year, 3800 Serbian Dinars. In the meantime everything has become more expensive, and if it weren't for divine providence, in which I strongly believe, I would be in more trouble than I am. Through the kindness of others, the Lord gives me everything I need to survive and be more or less healthy. In return I give everything I can. These days I have sewed many *dimije*[138] and blouses. The rest of the time I am crocheting. Today, instead of attending the Holy Mass (there is no electricity), we are studying the Bible. What can one do? Accept life as it comes, that's all there is to it. If God is willing, tomorrow I will knit some baby clothes for a newborn. Yesterday there was a lot of shooting, and even this morning is very "warlike". I don't know if I'll be able to visit my loved ones this afternoon.

21/10/1992

Today is Wednesday. My room is very cold, around fifteen degrees Celsius. We still don't have electricity. The water came back yesterday. It is difficult for

138 Ottoman style women's pants with loose bottoms

all of us, but we are living in hope that it will be over soon. In the house there are a few people left, mostly the older people. How we will survive the winter without heating or electricity I really can't imagine. Some of our neighbours have acquired heaters that burn wood for fuel, so sometimes we visit them to warm us up. My God, when will these horrors end? When will we live a normal life again? When will I, sister, find a letter from you in my mailbox? When will I hear your voice over the phone? When will I read a newspaper or a magazine? There has been none of this for six months already. I pray that God delivers us from this suffering, to stay sane throughout these mad times.

28/10/1992

Around ten days ago our church suffered a new attack. An explosive had finished off whatever had previously remained. It is sad seeing something that is dear to you destroyed in such a way. I pray to God that he forgives those who caused such evil.

15/12/1992

Above all else I am grateful to God for these beautiful sunny days when even we who have no other means of warming up can enjoy some radiant heat from the sun. My soul is warmed by the faith that within the warmth of the sun lives an eternal God, the Lord of Life and Death. Then I find many reasons to be joyful, despite all the suffering that is surrounding us. I am no longer afraid of death as it is simply a doorway to eternity.

19/2/1993

Our church suffered a third attack. The remaining tower and the right side of the church is now just a pile of bricks and mortar. It is sad to watch it all, but it is even sadder to see all the young people, even children, dying.

Lord, give us a miracle, save us from this suffering!

We haven't had water for a few days now. We haven't had electricity for ages. We are in need of electricity most of all; however, we have learned to live without it. Today there was a lot of shooting. Grenades flew around our house, and we are yet to find out how many people died.

9/4/1993

Today we are especially reminded of the suffering and death of Jesus. This year is the worst so far. While on the way home from the market, I passed by the ruins of our dear sacred place. The stone cross by the church stands untarnished and everyone is in awe of this. But the war carries on, and we don't know if at least the cross will remain. We are all eagerly anticipating the end of this wicked war, to live our lives in harmony and love, to see brothers in each other again.

18/4/1993

A litre of milk costs 15,000 Dinars. A loaf of bread costs 11,000 Dinars, and a kilo of coffee costs 200,000 Dinars. I walked past the church today. There is only a pile of brick and mortar left. The stone cross has been demolished!

2/7/1993

The worst part is not having electricity for days. Bread has become more expensive yet again. Now we have to pay 300,000 for a loaf. Today is the first Friday so I went to the place where I used to go for many years on this day. It is really desolate there. Your soul aches when you see it. I'm just wondering if there is an end to the evil. We have to calmly accept the bitterness that is eating us up within, and thank God for everything, and hope that it will finish one day There is no other way out.

25/7/1993

We are all, thank God, in good health. Now we have to pay for everything in millions. Can you imagine, I can only afford to buy four eggs with my pension, and nothing else! Today Mandica and I managed to listen to the Holy Mass in Sarajevo over the Wireless and we read a bit from the Bible. We are living in hope that this horrible war will soon be over.

6/9/1993

The other day we received aid from Caritas for the first time. I received eight kilograms of flour, a kilo of sugar, a kilo of rice, a kilo of beans, and a litre of oil. I waited in the queue for a full five hours, but it was worth it. The electricity is out for about an hour or two, but mostly it is back, thank God! It

is much easier with electricity. I've heard we might even get heating back. Then it won't be as difficult as last year.

15/5/1994

Today is my dear brother Ivica's birthday. Back in 1926 when he was born it was a Sunday like today. My grandma told me how in the town park there had been live music playing. He had a short life; he lived to be only nineteen years old. Sometimes I see him in my dreams. Last Sunday I received lots of groceries from Caritas that should last me a few months. I am grateful to everyone who allows this to happen.

8/9/1994

The Holy Mass, directly transmitted from Kastelgandolf by Radio Sarajevo, has just finished. I listened to the preaching of the Holy Father in our language. We are all disappointed that he couldn't come to Sarajevo. I am grateful to God that I managed to follow it at least via the radio. Mandica and I still kneel and pray, by candlelight, to the Blessed Virgin to beg of her Holy Son to end this war as soon as possible. I went to the Red Cross many times but I still haven't found your letter. In my daydreams we often walk along the Marjan[139]. When will this actually happen, only the dear Lord knows.

18/9/1994

Caritas has blessed us again and gave us a lot of food this Friday. We really miss the church. We pray at home. We try to abstain from sin as much as we can. Those books on spirituality that you gave us are helping a lot.

26/11/1995

Tonight, as I am writing this, it occurred to me after praying to ask your sisters - nuns - if they would accept me to live in the retirement home. If there is enough space and if they are willing to accept me. My family wants to go to Croatia, so what would I do here alone? That is just my idea, but what is the will of God, I don't know. My health has been serving me, thank God. My family has decided to ask for at least a part of their house, so if they are successful they will try and swap it for a house in Croatia. We all have our own plans and ideas, but I always say that God's will is final.

139 A hill near Split in Croatia

28/7/1996

They have opened up a kitchen for the elderly, over 65 years old. There is no more starvation. Caritas often gives out food, and we also received some warm shoes for the winter.

8/9/1996

Today has been an extraordinary day for me. I was in Makljenovac and for the first time in four years I was at the Holy Mass, singing alongside dear sister Melanija. Our priest and his Holiness Ivan celebrated the Holy Mass. We crossed the "border" with no problems. After four years, four years of terrible suffering, Christ the Lord arrived in the form of a small sacred Hostia and brought true joy to our souls. Now everything is easier to bear!

3/11/1996

Mandica and I have just arrived from Makljenovac. It was a warm, sunny, and beautiful day. There were many of us from Doboj. Some came on their bikes, but most of them walked. The bishop's assistant came along with the reverend pastor and sister Melanija, and delivered a great sermon He took a photo of us and of the house where we celebrated the Holy Mass. He gave each of us 50 Deutsche Marks each as financial assistance. He told us to be patient, and that we would have a Holy Mass in Doboj again soon.

11/5/1997

These days I have experienced joy. Zvonko came with Mirko, the handy-man (a refugee from Sanski Most) and he fixed my boiler which had been broken for the past few years. He promised to fix my sewing machine as well. He fixed all the other broken bits for the others in the house. He is a nice and respectable man. His wife is Catholic, and his cousin knew a priest who was murdered like a martyr... Today in Makljenovac we had a small ceremony. We had ten first communions, and two babies were baptised...

13/7/1997

Yesterday we were in Makljenovac. Jagica came with me. It was the First Communion. There were fourteen people for the First Communion. Mister Archbishop Pero Sudar gave a lovely sermon, and our Lord was happy that

we celebrated this in Makljenovac, that we didn't have to go to another parish. The Holy Mass was early today, around 9 am. I went alone as Jagica had gone to Odžak. It was a beautiful walk, the sky was blue, not a single cloud to be seen. There was a slight breeze; it also celebrated the Creator in its own way. Next Sunday our Lord will come to Makljenovac again.

1/1/1998

Happy New Year to you! For me it was joyful as my brother, after fifty years, joined us at the Holy Mass in Makljenovac! He said he had forgotten God, but God hadn't forgotten about him...

19/4/1998

I can still hear your dear voice in my ears. I live in the hope that we will see each other soon, if God wills it. The walk to Makljenovac is now a real treat, everything is green, all the fruit trees are blossoming. The birds are cheerfully chirping and they celebrate the Creator in their own way...

These are excerpts of the diary of Elizabeta Bem. The last name Bem doesn't exist in Doboj anymore. It has joined the Krilić, Tušla, Jiral, Vlahušić, Križek, Hošček, Jurkas, Pinjušić, Duspara, Majetić and Kordić families, and thousands of others who have forever disappeared from the railway town. It lasted between the two wars, for the duration of a whole yet modest human life, with God's mercy and grace, as Elizabeta Bem, more commonly known to others as Aunty Elza, would say. She learned to write her first letters during the Second World War. That neat handwriting couldn't have known it would describe the horrors of another dark age. During the last war from 1992-1995 Elizabeta kept a diary, actually unsent letters to her sister Alma Bem who was a nun in a monastery in Split, Croatia. That diary, written in a concerned yet trusting and prayer filled hand, was read by the first priest in Doboj after the war, Josip Senjak. He had the letters printed and from that archival resource of around one hundred pages in A4 format, he took excerpts and included them in his monumental monograph "Celebrating 110 Years of the Doboj Parish from 1896-2006". Elizabeta Bem, in declining health and aging, remained in the town where she had spent her whole life. With tears in her eyes she left Doboj in Autumn 2008, joining her sister Alma in the monastery in Split where her sister Alma lived. Parts of her library, prayer books, and prayers were kept by her niece Zlata Martinović. Thank to her kindness, the life of Elizabeta Bem has been presented with this memory and sentences:

"She was born in Slavonia, in Jakšić near Požega, on the 17/4/1935. Her parents were Josip and Marija Bem, nee Hirschman. They had four children, daughters Alma and Elizabeta, and sons Ivica and Josip. She had a difficult life, as she had lost her mother as a small child, and her step mother, who had already had her own daughter, threw her and her brothers out of the home. Her eldest sister went to a monastery where she took the name Alma and completed medical vocational high school. She worked as a nurse in Bitola and in Zagreb and retired in the monastery in Split.

Her father Josip Bem worked for the railways in Osijek. When he re-married he moved to Koprivnica and under the influence of his new wife, neglected his children. His youngest son Josip was given away while still in nappies to his sister Katica in Doboj, but the father kept his child allowance. The elder son Ivica was sent away to be a butcher apprentice. Soon he was mobilised in the war and died as a prisoner of war.

Elizabeta took all of this to heart. She cried a lot, lamenting the fact that she was left without a mother and her family. She wanted to go to the monastery but they wouldn't take her.

She managed to finish a vocational school to be a tailor and she looked after the child of the woman who taught her the craft. This is how she survived throughout the war (Second World War). After the war she moved to Doboj with her aunty Katica and brother Josip. She got a job at a tailoring salon. Later she worked as a taylor for the hospital in Doboj and was granted a small one-room apartment from them. She attended church regularly, sang, and participated in all the prayer activities. She worked with the nuns from Doboj and other parts of the country, and would often sew for them.

As the church in Doboj was destroyed during this last war, she would often walk several kilometres to the improvised church in Makljenovac, on a field with the altar in a camper van. When the church was rebuilt after the war, in 2005, she continued to pray with the same fervour and delight as before.

During the war she took in her brother Josip and his wife to live with her in her small flat as they had been violently thrown out of their own home. She would often sew for her neighbours in return for food. That is how the three of them survived the war time years – thanks to her own hands, thanks to Caritas, praying daily, and reading the Bible.

When she became ill she was accepted kindly by the nuns in Split, in the monastery "Daughters of the Love of God" under the Marjan hill. She spent her last days there, in prayer and in conversation. She died in November 2016. Her body was buried next to her sister Alma's grave, in the graveyard of the nuns in Split."

On Their Side

I didn't sign up. For days I could hear announcements on Radio Doboj that we needed to sign up at the Dom JNA for recruitment to defend Doboj. What defense? What protection? They occupied the town, I'm not even allowed to walk freely, and now they want me to defend a town that they themselves have occupied? From whom should I protect the town? From myself?

They said that whoever doesn't sign up will have to suffer the consequences. They threatened us, but I didn't sign up!

I had decided; I wasn't going anywhere. I have nowhere to run. This is my town, where I was born, and I'll stay until I'm forcefully removed. Who fancies war can have their own war. I won't be on their side!

What a fool I was! That is what I believed, in all my foolishness! And every new day was worse than the one before, and it became harder and harder to carry my name. You could see who I was from a mile away and they weren't happy with who I was. I didn't choose my mother, or my father, but if I could have chosen, I would have chosen them all over again. Better parents I wouldn't be able to find anywhere in this world.

I admit I was wrong. I thought it would blow over. So what? They have occupied the town and established their own government. What else do they want? I thought they would leave us alone. I'd never done anything wrong to anyone. I didn't own any weapons, and all I did have were my years which had already surpassed me and pushed me into old age. I'm not even capable of being in a war, I thought.

But they thought differently. We were all on a list. They knew exactly where everyone lived, who lived with whom and how to grab them by the balls. Against my will they forced me into a labour camp. They arrested me, literally.

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140 Yugoslav National Army Centre – a building serving for military-civil affairs purposes such as meetings, concerts, public events, various celebrations and festivities

The army police came to the door, said, "Are you this and that?".

"I am."

"Come with us."

"Our soldiers are out there dying and you're here sleeping!" A soldier in a camouflage uniform yelled at me.

"We won't have any of that anymore!"

They led me to the garrison. There were fifty other unfortunate souls such as myself already there. I thought they would kill us - that they were just waiting for night to fall so that it wasn't so obvious. I couldn't sleep for a second. Right before dawn, I started to get drowsy, and that was when I was woken by someone opening the door and screaming, "Get up!"

They lined us up two by two. One was counting. The first ten are going to Rudanka, the other ten to Bare, the next group to Grapska, the next one to Stanovi, and then they got to my group which was sent to dig trenches at Putnik Hill. We were actually the biggest working group; I counted twenty of us. We were shepherded along by two men armed with automatic guns.

"If you try anything, we shoot!" they warned. "You have nowhere to escape! In front of you is a minefield. No one can make it through alive. It's best if you follow our orders. After the days' work you'll be sent back to the garrison."

First, one is frozen by fear, but then warmed by hope. We will stay alive, after all! We just need to make it through this cold April rain and wade through mud that is knee-deep, and bend over to feel the earth, because the sniper from the other side can't read your name and doesn't know of your misfortunes.

The first day passed somehow, and the second hinted at the necessity of using the pickaxe and spade as self-defence on the third day, like an unavoidable evil. We dug the trenches, connected their lines. Earlier, none of us had been a manual labourer, so there was nothing that would spare our hands. We got bloody blisters straight away. When they popped, the pain in the raw flesh was excruciating to bear, but we couldn't stop, let alone complain. The shooting echoed from morning to evening. Somewhere in the vicinity, we could hear PAM[141], but the loudest were the tank grenades. Every time the earth shook, one wondered who had died. Who on the other side was the one we

141 PAM is anti-aircraft machine gun

would never see again? You never know, maybe your clock is ticking and will be stopped by the explosive mortars that were coming from the other side, from "your side".

In every whistle that flew over one's head you anticipate the worst. You're alone between two fires! Between yesterday's neighbours and friends! Between fear and misery! And there's no escape! They'll shoot you like a rabbit, straight in the back. If you jump out of the trench and run to your side, you'll be dismembered by a landmine! Grey from fury, from the desolation of this Putnik Hill, where once you picked raspberries and listened to the birds sing, you were now surrounded by the sounds of explosions and there was no escape...

The next day, the sun shone for a few moments, tentatively, as if it was deciding whether it had a valid reason to rise onto this hill clearing. In that brief instance of beauty, I felt something - I don't know how or what - something strange. The thought flashed in a second – something isn't right, this beauty won't come to anything good. I couldn't hear the whistling of grenades as an explosion threw me up into the air and three to four meters away from where I had been standing. I crashed to the ground. Fierce pain pulsed through my body.

"It's over!" I thought and fell into darkness.

I awoke in the hospital.

The story is inspired by the personal account of Suljo Bećarević, once the legendary goalkeeper of the Doboj "Željezničar" football team, who was wounded on Putnik Hill in 1993. There is a personal account, as well as one from the local newspaper:

"At the end of April 1993, the army police came for me and twenty other people from Doboj and we were taken to Putnik Hill – location of Porin - to dig trenches in a minefield. On the twelfth of May that year, I was wounded alongside three other men, and one who died, Hamzalija Jusičić. We were transferred to the hospital and I was there for 22 days. They came for me again the second day after I left hospital to take me back to dig trenches. There, a doctor did a check-up and found me incapable of manual labour. We managed to escape Doboj when they were forcing people out of their homes from Mala Bukovica and Čivčije. Three buses left Doboj at that time. We paid 200 German Marks per person to leave. They let us out at the Vlašić plateau and we had to walk to Turbe on foot..."

In the town where everything had changed overnight, even the local newspaper "Glas komuna" got a new name - "Novi glas"[142]. The old voice of the respected paper of the Doboj region was never to be heard again, and this new one existed solely to further the war propaganda.

So, in the newspaper article titled "Ivica Has Died", from the newspaper dated 19th March, 1993, we can read:

"On Saturday, while members of the Army of Republika Srpska were on their way to the group voting places, in the area of Razbjenjak, Ivica Kopljar (son of Mate) was killed. He was born in 1961 in Doboj. Ivica was killed by bullets from anti-aircraft tanks, shot from enemy lines, from the direction of Sivša. Naively believing in the peace agreement of that day, on the 12th of May, Suljo Bećarević, Ismet Halebić, Jasmin Zečević, and Emir Kovačević were wounded by launch missiles while protecting the city. The aforementioned examples, although rare, are proof that in this battle against wild fascism and fundamentalism we can find peoples of other nationalities... To bolster the fact that there aren't more of them in the Serbian army, we have only the fanatical ideologists of the Croatian and Muslim people to blame. They wish to build their own nations on these lands."

The "Group Voting" that is mentioned in this propagandist article refers to an attempt to legitimise the Serbian aggression with a referendum and thus transfer the war goals to political goals that would be "the will of the people".

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142 From "The Voice of the Community" to "A New Voice"

International observers judged the referendum to be fabricated and falsified. Apparently a million voters, with a 97% majority, had voted against the Vance-Owen peace treaty and the plan to join Republika Srpska with another country.

On The Metal Bridge

They were arrested by their neighbours, locals from the Ozren mountain, in their village Jablanica near Maglaj. They didn't want to leave. They didn't have weapons, they were civilians. They had worked in the Maglaj factory "Natron"[143] right up until the start of the war. They marched them to the concentration camp in Usora. They didn't eat anything for three days. Suddenly, Boško, the guard commander entered the hangar and ordered them all to line up. He led three men outside. There they were met by the Red Berets. As soon as they stepped foot outside, they were met with torrents of verbal and physical abuse. They were covered in blood when they were taken back in. Then they ordered the next three men to step outside, and then the next, until they had all been brutally beaten. Some of them were semiconscious and were whimpering in pain in the hangar.

An hour later, Boško opened the door and asked if anyone needed a doctor.

False hope awoke in the people's hearts. Four men asked for help. They were pushed into a van on which was written ŽGP, Željezničko građevinsko preduzeće, OOUR Doboj[144].

Instead of being driven to the hospital, they were taken to the old metal bridge on the river Bosna.

"If you cross the bridge, your army is waiting on the other side!" they said.

On the rusty old metal there were two rotting planks of wood. In more than one place one could see gaping holes, and the Bosna river was high, overflowing onto the Pridjel fields.

As soon as the camp inmates made five or six tentative steps, those from the other side started shooting. Instead of seeing a doctor, they had arrived at

143 Pulp processing plant

144 Railway Construction Company. OOUR stands for Basic Organisation for Joint Work, which was the basic business entity in the Former Socialist Yugoslavia

their place of death. Three didn't make it over the bridge. Shot with bullets in the back, they fell on the narrow crossing, or they lifelessly dropped into the rapidly flowing river. Safet Salkić miraculously made it over alive, despite a bullet missing his head by a hair. He crawled over the holes and hid in the bushes on the other side. He saw them walking around with a battery powered lamp, checking for evidence of their crimes, and then discarding it by throwing bodies from the bridge into the deep river. Safet was saved by night. He escaped to Pridjel where he found safety in the house of Bećir Grahić. That good man hid him and later helped him to escape across the river to the other side towards Karuše and Matuzići.

The next day Boško led out the next group that was to be executed. That evening no one managed to cross the river.

And the day after that, the "Žegrap"[145] van was waiting in front of the hangar.

"Leave your ID cards at the front desk. You won't need them at the doctor's," Boško ordered.

When they started leading the prisoners towards the bridge, Jasmin Hasanić wrenched away from his "guard", a youngster around his age, and started running down the river. They shot after him! He jumped into the overflowing river! He was saved by the night, managed to swim downstream, on the same side of the river. He heard rapid fire on the bridge that took away the lives of his neighbours from Jablanica.

Night was his ally. He escaped wet and chilled to the bone over Miljkovac and past the Serb lines on the Putnik Hill. There was heavy rainfall and he climbed over the empty trenches. No one noticed him. The soldiers had moved into the nearby abandoned houses for shelter. He crossed over the line separating the two sides and not knowing it, over the minefield on the way to Ularice.

Surprised by the unexpected wet visitor, the soldiers of HVO[146] took him in and led him to the Terrotorial Defense Unit of Tešanjka.

It was on that day, in June 1992, that Jasmin Hasanić turned 21 when the heavens had thrice given him life.

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145 Žegrap is an abbreviation for Željezničko građevinsko preduzeće (Railway Construction Company)

146 HVO – Croatian Defence Council, the armed forces of the Croat ethnic population during the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina 1992-1995

Of the 15 citizens of Jablanica who were taken to the hangar on the Usora, only two survived the execution by shooting: Safet Salkić and Jasmin Hasanić. Ekrem and Salih Bradarić, Mustafa, Almir and Naim Bajrić, Asim Bašić, Ibrišim Begić, Hasib Hasukić, and Muhamed, Mujo and Senad Bradarić, all lost their lives. The remains of three bodies were found downstream in the Doboj region, and in Podnovlje, and as far away as Sremska Mitrovica. After a great flood in Doboj in 2014, following the retreat of the water, another mass grave was discovered, near Usora, about 400 meters from the Metal Bridge. Four complete bodies were exhumed, along with two incomplete bodies. The representative of the Institute for Missing Persons in Bosnia and Herzegovina said that the bodies were found with their arms tied behind their backs with a wire. A later DNA analysis confirmed that these were the missing persons from Jablanica. The others are still missing. The execution of the civilians, despite eye-witness accounts, was never legally processed and the criminals were never held accountable for their crimes.

The Goalgetter's 1992

They say that this is an unbelievable story: from war tragedy to triumph in sports, from misfortune to success, from poverty to comfort. I'm not sure where to begin, but I know that my fate was sealed that year, in 1992. I grew up that year and it led me to the outer perimeters of the world, to a place that doesn't exist even in movie scripts.

My name is Aleksandar Đurić and my friends call me Njama. I was born on the 12th of August 1970 in Lipac near Doboj. Even though my zodiac sign is Leo, the doctor said I had "pigeon breast" in an early check-up, and that my deformity should be corrected through exercise. As a child I walked over the bridge connecting the town with the railway station and eagerly watched the kayakers. The kayak-canoe club "Wave" was located underneath the bridge and I couldn't even begin to hope that I would row one day. I could barely swim. When I signed up for canoeing the trainer said, very seriously, "God help you if you capsize!"

I completed school up to the fourth grade in Lipac and then continued my education at the primary school "Josip Jovanović". Upon completing primary education, I attended vocational secondary school and trained as a car mechanic. I knew from the start, however, that I shouldn't try to "find myself" in the mechanic's workshop – I wanted it to be in sports. I trained in karate, handball, football. I was an up-and-coming goalkeeper in some of the younger leagues of the Football Club "Sloga", but rowing occupied all my thoughts. One day I was invited to train with the "Wave" rowing club by Damir and Samir Vošanović who were my neighbours from Potkamen. They told me that Adidas gave brand new equipment to all new members, and that such a gift shouldn't be turned away.

It was in 1983. At that time there was a generational shift within the Doboj kayakers. The club had so far been dominated by people from Usora, the legends and representatives of Ex-Yugoslavia: Ivica Jurilj, Vlado Lujić, Pompe, Žuti, Guro, Mato and Fočo Krajinović, Zdravko Jeleč and Nenad

Markočević. Then we arrived, the kids from Lipac and Potkamen. Our trainer was Ivica Jurilj, and the president of the club was Jusuf Makarević. We trained like mad! I ran 30 kilometers every day, in the rain and snow, humidity and heat, from Preslica or the army garrison in Ševarlije, and I rowed even when the river Bosna was ice cold.

The financial situation at home wasn't great. My father drank a lot; he was an alcoholic. I got up every morning before school at five o'clock to take the cow out to graze, and would collect cardboard, metal, and glass bottles at the rubbish dump. I didn't mind doing any of it and I wasn't ashamed of any kind of work. I realised, however, that sport meant everything to me. Others would go to the seaside to relax and holiday, and I would run and compete with myself, not wanting to miss a single chance to train. The results followed. I was the junior champion in canoeing in 500 and 1000 meters, and the senior champion in 10,000 meters.

Then I had to go to the Yugoslav Obligatory Army Service: Bileća, the school for reserve officers. I left without saying goodbye and was one of the best cadets in the military school there. After about six months I was transferred to Pančevo, then in the "Maršal Tito" garrison in Zagreb. While serving the army I got an order to go to Vukovar in 1991. I had the rank of second lieutenant and I was under the impression that the unit I was leading was sent there to protect the local civilian population. Unfortunately, that wasn't the case. In Vukovar it was the opposite. There were no rules, corpses lay all around us, and we were sent blindly not knowing what our role or mission was. I had young soldiers around me and quickly realised that it wasn't the war that we were told to expect. I wanted to protect my people and not to kill. I never divided people by their religion or nationality. I realised I was in the wrong place at the wrong time.

One evening I was summoned to some kind of meeting. I found myself in the company of strange people, all of them drunkards who were talking non-sense. I didn't like people who were aggressive and impulsive, who believed they were untouchable. I stood up and asked what my job was, as an army official. I was told to shoot anyone who was against us.

At the time I was 21 years old. I said I wouldn't command my soldiers to shoot and kill civilians, that I wouldn't allow them to get away with looting, and that I firmly believed that it was not what we were supposed to be doing. I added that I would in fact shoot anyone who was upsetting peaceful order.

Those big boys didn't like my attitude, and unfortunately, neither did my superiors. As I arrived to the main command camp, I was arrested and stripped of my ranks and thrown into a military jail. Two days later they decided to take me to the investigative detention in my hometown.

"Son, it's time for you to leave this place!" said my father upon our meeting. Thanks to my friends and his, I managed to escape that same night over the border to Hungary. In my pocket I had 300 German Marks and an uncertain future. Before leaving I had a difficult and painful feeling deep down that I was forever losing my hometown and my home. I knew I wouldn't be coming back.

I hid in Segedin, lost, alone, without anything anywhere. The war had already started in Bosnia. I don't even know how they managed to find me, but anyway through some radio-amateurs I received an offer from the Olympic committee of the newly independent Bosnia and Herzegovina to represent the country in the rowing discipline at the Olympic Games in Barcelona. In any normal situation everyone would be proud of me for this offer; however, in war times during 1992, in an open conflict, my participation as a Serb in the team of Bosnia and Herzegovina was not taken well by the Serbs. My father was emphatically opposed. He was in the Serbian army and he sent me a message saying that if I went with the team of Bosnia and Herzegovina, he would never speak to me again. I was in a dilemma and I had to make a difficult decision. I believed in the Olympic spirit, in the nobility of sport, in being a "good sport", respect, community, humanity... I said to myself, "I'll go!" I am, first and always foremost, a sportsman! I'll represent the country of Bosnia and Herzegovina. That was where I was born, spent a happy childhood and youth, and in that country we had all lived together peacefully.

I spoke to my brother. "I can't tell dad, he'll go crazy. I'll just tell mum," I said.

The two of them watched the opening of the Games, my mother and brother, and they saw me on TV. Olympians go to the Games as respected sportspeople, practically like heroes, and I walked beneath the Bosnian flag knowing half of the people in my country would shoot me, and the other half wouldn't trust if I was really on their side.

And none of them knew I went to the Olympic games as a hitchhiker!

As a refugee I didn't even have a passport, not to mention enough money to get to Barcelona. I didn't have anything to eat, let alone to travel to Spain. I was advised to somehow get myself to Ljubljana. I had my old Yugoslavian

passport, and I needed to get the new, Bosnian one in Slovenia. When they picked me up in the trucks the Hungarians asked me where I was going.

I answered truthfully that I was going to the Olympic Games in Barcelona.

They thought I was completely insane, none of the drivers could believe that an Olympian was travelling to the Games as a hitchhiker! The border between Hungary and Austria I crossed on foot. The Austrian border policeman also didn't believe what I told him. I don't have a car, I don't even have a bag, just an oar and a letter from the Olympic Committee that I'm not crossing as a refugee, but as an Olympian.

Everyone was in awe but they let me cross anyway. They even found someone to drive me to Ljubljana, and then I hitchhiked my way to the airport where the Bosnian team was set to meet up. The leader of the team was Miroslav Šipek who would later become the trainer of the Australian rifle shooting national team. There were ten of us in total. Mirjana Horvat (she got to the final in rifle shooting), Mirsada Burić, Kada Delić, Zlatan Saračević and Demir Mustafić (athletics), Janko Gojković and Anja Margetić (swimming), Vlado Paradžik (judo), Mehmed Skender (weightlifting), and me, Aleksandar Đurić, canoe 500 meters.

I will never forget that feeling when we walked out of the tunnel in the Olympic stadium, when the speaker announced: Bosnia and Herzegovina! We were among the smallest teams, and the whole stadium stood up to greet us. The whole stadium cheered for us and sincerely wished that the war would stop.

The Spaniards felt sorry for me when they saw that all I had was an oar. The Spanish Federation donated equipment, and the Italians lent me a canoe. However, I hadn't trained for six months. I gave it my best but I didn't get into the round of serious competitors. I lost in the qualifying heats. Still, I am proud of my Olympic participation. I thought I would be representing Yugoslavia, but my country fell apart, so I represented Bosnia, for which I lost my father!

He didn't speak to me for the rest of his life. It was only when he got the worst diagnosis that my brother called me and said dad wanted to see me. The doctor had told them that he (my father) was in the final stages and that it was a matter of days. At the time I was in Singapore. The club gave me leave and I left straight away. I arrived in the evening and spoke to him for about two hours. In the morning he felt sick, and in the afternoon he just closed his eyes. Regardless of many problems we had had, and mutual disagreements, I

still respected him. I felt fortunate to have been able to see him alive at least that one time. Maybe he would have forgiven me those Olympics sooner, but for my mother's death he couldn't forgive me.

My mother died in Lipac on the 9th of August 1993 from wounds from a grenade thrown by the Bosnian Army during some kind of local peacetime. She had come to the front of the house to have a coffee with my father. The grenade fell. My father was closer to it than she was, and even though it struck him really hard, it was she who didn't survive, and I lost my dearest mother. I didn't even know she had died. They had buried her a few days later in the middle of the night, for fear of further shelling. I was in Hungary at the time and I just received a message five days later: Your mother has died!

I was lost for words. She was 46 years old. After her death my father blamed me even more. He told my brother that by competing under the colours of the Bosnian flag I had killed my mother.

I often think about that. Sport has shaped my life. I was proud of my Olympic participation, and it proved my belief that on this earth we're all the same, regardless of skin colour, religious beliefs, or nationality. On the other hand, I had always wanted to help my family but I didn't manage to help either of my parents only my brother.

Ninety-two dragged on. I was 22 years old and I realised that I couldn't return to Bosnia and had to keep moving. My friends from Doboj, Željko Tipura and Dunis Sarajlić, contacted me from Sweden, saying they had managed to get there and told me to join them. We met in Ystad. After staying at the refugee camp we were given accommodation at some hotel. We thought we'd be in the same room. The Swedes had already had a taste of our nationalist excesses in asylum. Knowing that Tipura was a Croat, Dunis a Muslim, and me a Serb, they separated us instantly. We had to convince them that we didn't want to be separated, that we were friends and wanted to stay together!

Unfortunately, I couldn't stay in Scandinavia. Due to some stupid asylum conditions and my previous extended stay in Hungary, I was turned away from Sweden. I had to go back to Segedin. There I was taken in by Jusuf Makarević, who had helped me and many others on our journey towards Europe or further abroad.

I found a new friend, the well-known Hungarian kayaker Arpad Farkaš. To this day we are great friends. I realized rowing wouldn't help me survive. Arpad convinced me to try and play football.

"At least you'll be well fed!" Arpad advised me, and took me to a club to arrange a trial. That is how I started playing football, at the age of 22.

Segedin was in the Second League, and I started in the position of the left defender. I was never a "master of technique", but I was a keen learner. Every day after training I would stay longer to practise. I got stronger. I started scoring goals. My professional football career started with a monthly salary of 350 German Marks[147]. It wasn't enough for food. Every day I ate only eggs and bread, with sometimes an odd sausage thrown in.

My friend Arpad saw my living conditions.

"Hello man, you can't survive on that money! Come onto the street, exchange and sell foreign currencies on the black market. I'll give you some money to start with!"

I had to swallow my pride. As a sportsperson I had never hurt a fly, and now I had to sell shady currencies like some lowlife, and to chase up on our people who had come to Segedin to buy. My first deal was a disaster. Arpad gave me a thousand German Marks in Hungarian Forints. I was selling currencies to a Yugoslav married couple. The operation was supposed to be simple: take their German Marks, calculate the exchange rate and then give them Forints. Afraid of being caught by the police, I was all confused and naïve. When I counted my money later on, I had given them all my Forints and they were gone like the wind. I was down 800 Dollars and had only just started working! I had to learn quickly, and I did learn, but I was aware that this was a passing part of my life. In Hungary I received permanent residency; however, I had to keep going as I couldn't go back to Bosnia.

And that is how I ended up in Australia. As a sportsperson I received a residency visa and in September 1995 I landed in Melbourne. Our trainer from Novi Sad, Frank Arok, the ex-coach of Australia, was looking for taller, stronger players.

"We have a lad from Bosnia, he doesn't have any papers but he's a good player!" was the recommendation he received.

After a two-week trial, I got the job and signed a contract with one of Australia's best football teams, the South Melbourne Hellas. Later, I was scouted during a game by some Chinese scouts, and worked in China. I played there for two seasons. At the end of 1999, I was in Singapore where I

147 which was not much at the time

live to this day. I knew that was a clean country, with a warm climate and very humid. I loved Singapore from day one, the city and the country, and the harmony in which people of all different nationalities and languages lived. I wished for my children to grow up in such a harmonious environment. They had been looking for a striker player and even though that was something I hadn't done, I said to myself that I could prove that I could do it! It wasn't easy in the beginning, but then it got easier. I started scoring goals from all kinds of possible and impossible angles.

I became a part of their national team at age 37. I was the first foreigner in their sporting history to receive captain stripes. For their representation I played 54 matches and shook the net 27 times. The news and TV would always mention my name. "Alex Duric" was their idol! A face on the front pages of their magazines and TV screens. The institute for football statistics pronounced me the best goalgetter in the world in 2011. At the time I was already "getting old", at 41, and the statisticians noted that in 444 professional league games I had scored 328 goals. I ended my professional football career aged 44. Once a canoe boy from the Doboj club "Wave" now had 350 goals in 14 seasons under his belt. Truly unbelievable!

Three times they rejected my application for citizenship, but I was persistent. I grew to love that country. Due to its multiethnic population, various languages and combination of cultures, it reminded me of Ex-Yugoslavia. I finally found the home I had been searching for for many years, right here! I finally started to live again! My children were born here: daughter Isabella and son Alessandro. I was married to Nataša at the time and we adopted a third child, a son Massimo. Following our divorce, they stayed in Australia and I stayed in Singapore and adopted a son, Emanuel, as a single parent. He is 18 months old. I am a single dad and a housekeeper helps me with the child.

I came from poverty, and still money was never the ultimate goal for me. I won't take it to my grave. I aim to be, and to remain, a good person. I am still, of course, very active. I run 15 kilometers every day. I don't drink or smoke, and I go to bed early. I participate in many charitable activities, I volunteer in a home for orphans. I help and teach others. I work as a trainer and as the sports director in the Ministry for Sport in Singapore. I am trying to shape new generations of children that will be active sportspeople. The world we are living in is changing. As much as technology helps us, it also takes away from the active part of our lives. Children are chained to games and their phones. My job is to encourage children to socialize, to play sport and to be

good players as well as people and civilians. That is my mission and my vision for the future.

I wrote and published a book in 2016 called "Beyond Borders" in which I described my life pathway, from a family tragedy to the world triumph. I wanted to convey that everything is possible if you believe in yourself and if you are dedicated to your goal. Hard work brings results, whether or not we're referring to sport, school, or any other kind of work. Everything you do, try and do to the best of your abilities and the results won't fail you. I started my football career aged 22 in an attempt to survive, and hung up my football boots aged 44.

My whole life I was faced with borders and limitations, but I believe that in my journey from poverty to relative wealth I managed to retain my humanity.

Within my soul I haven't changed. I am the same Njama from Lipac, near Doboj.

Homeland – My Part of the World

He was deluded – his case did not in fact start with his teacher Ramo categorising him as a Croat. That was just a casual anecdote, true after all, and in his part of the world this seemingly naive categorization and seemingly innocent symbolism brought far reaching consequences.

Anyway, what did good old Ramo know? He was ordered by the school director, who in turn was instructed by the Committee orders, to register all the pupils according to their nationality, which was to be used later for statistics (that we know was a conglomeration of fabricated data). The teacher Cvijeta interrupted the class time in order to complete the "counting duty". The little Serbs raised their hands, the little Croats raised their hands, the little "nationally undetermined" raised their hands (in 1953, Muslims – Bosnian "Bošnjaci"[148] weren't yet recognised as a separate ethnicity, and so they had to declare their nationality as Muslim Croats, or Muslim Serbs, or, mostly, nationally/ethnically undetermined). Everyone raised their hands, only the little first grader Andrija sat there silently.

"And you, boy? What are you?"

"I am Catholic," the little blonde boy answered.

"What is your name?"

"Andrija."

"Ok! We will put you down as a Croat then, Andrija." the teacher Ramo said, concluding that based on the name and religion his decision made perfect sense. In five minutes (for according to the comrades from the Committee, time mustn't be wasted on that activity) the teacher had classified pupils in the class First Year, B. The next moment, sitting on their wooden stools in the classroom, poor as they had always been, they were all once again the same, divided only by their good or bad grades. (In Cvijeta's class no one could fail.)

148 Bošnjak (plural: Bošnjaci) – a word used mostly by muslim Bosnians to define their nationhood. The word predates the arrival of Islam in the region.

His grandfather, István Kovács, had been in a life changing fallacy when in his autumn years, after the death of his wife Etel Nagy, he decided to move from Hungary in search for a better future for his two young children, daughter Erszébet and son András. It was the year of 1900 when he settled in Vučijak near Prnjavor. The Austro-Hungarian empire was encouraging the settlement of new agrarian communities in parts of the empire that were sparsely populated. They received twelve hectares of forested land, with help from a loan and tax exemptions from the kingdom. The previously devastated municipality of Prnjavor with ten thousand migrants - German, Hungarian, Italian, Czech, Slovak, Polish, and Russian became known as "little Europe".

Alas, the dreams of Europe are unattainable in the Balkans. From the first day there was a collision of civilisations. The migrants, despite their good work ethic and strong hands, were treated with suspicion and were called by the derogatory nickname "kuferaši"[149]. They had hoped, as all migrants hope, that if not the older generation, at least the children would be accepted and treated better in their new home. The daughter married and István's son András stayed on his father's land. He married a Hungarian woman from the same village, Julijana Varga, and they had four children who were all named after their ancestors, in accordance with their Hungarian custom. The first was István, then Sándor, then János, and the daughter was Etel. The Empire crumbled and the country became the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes, but despite the newly acquired citizenship, the branding of foreigner was still used on the forthcoming younger generations. Their fate was sealed in 1943 when the Četnik army from Vučijak plundered and exiled them from their homes - all of the Hungarian migrants. They "generously" allowed them two suitcases each, and a smaller one for the children. In Bosnia now there was only one "kuferaš" – Andraás' son János, who at the time wasn't living on the hill above Prnjavor known as Vučijak, but had left as a young man to seek his own fortune, settling down near the Usora river near Doboj. He was working as a welder, mainly on trains. Nevertheless, what is meant to be will happen. You can't stop fate. In 1945, the Partisan government announced that it would forcefully confiscate all of the Kovács' family property as they were "German citizens", so, after living and working in Bosnia for 43 years, along with everything they had originally brought with them, everything was taken away in a heartbeat.

149 Kufer – means suitcase; the nickname refers to "suitcase carriers (or holders)"

János, the last descendant of the Hungarian migrants, had his name changed to Ivan by the people's government. He married Karolina Jaki, the daughter of Jozef Jaki who was a German descendant living on Putnik Hill near Doboj. In this happy marriage they communicated at home in three languages: German, Hungarian, and the "local" language, that to them was always the same but changed its name officially from Serbian to Croatian, and to Serbo-Croatian, depending on political whims. Ivan and Vera had three children, one daughter and two sons. All three were born in three different countries: Marija in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia (she died as an infant from galloping consumption), Franjo in the Independent State of Croatia, and the third, our little Andrija from the beginning of our story, in the Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia. The names of the country changed, states appeared and disappeared, but their hometown stayed in the same place. It seemed like the family Kovács, now Kovač, after all their elders had worked for and had taken away from them, by God's grace, had finally earned the right to their very own hometown. The two brothers sincerely loved Doboj and their Usora suburb. Their parents gave them the best education they could manage with their meagre means. Both of them completed university education and became experts in their field with honourable names and surnames. Even when their father Ivan suddenly died too young in the 1970's, they believed that their existence in Bosnia had overcome nationalist differences from the past and that their children belonged to a mutually inclusive future. Their dreams lasted until 1992.

Now, little/big Andrija, in repeated history, is standing on his balcony in the building on Džemala Bijedića Street watching as a police car parks underneath Balić's oak tree. From the loudspeakers he can hear the announcement:

"Citizens are being informed that they have to surrender all their weapons by two o'clock in the afternoon, otherwise force will be used without any hesitation!"

In Celjska Street, three tanks roar by, tearing up the asphalt, with about twenty soldiers in camouflaged uniforms sitting outside on the tanks hull. They raise three fingers in the faces of alarmed passers-by.

The grenades started whistling and the town was shaking about ten minutes past two o'clock in the afternoon.

The fire was concentrated on the old fortress and the houses surrounding it, where one could see flashes of light that meant that someone was also shooting from inside the buildings. From the tower on the fortress and the first building to the right of the fortress *Gradina*, someone was returning fire. This lasted for about two hours, until the Serbian army climbed up to where the old town *Čaršija* and fortress *Gradina* were, and the Serbian tricolours[150] emerged. With this appearance of the Serbian army there in the relatively empty and highest point of the town, it became clear that Doboj had been "liberated" according to some, and also occupied, according to others.

After that, as night started falling, more and more houses burned in the surrounding hills and in the old part of the town. This would become a recurring image over the coming weeks and months. The burning would continue mostly towards the southwest where Muslims and Croats lived. All of the suburbian parts of the town and its surrounding villages with a Serb majority (Bare, Pločnik, Rudanka, Čivčije, Stanovi, Stanari, Osječani, Kožuhe, Bušletić, Gavrići, Jošava, Lipac, Pridjel) had long been occupied by the Serbian army. The burning scenario was more or less always the same. In the afternoons, armed people in camouflaged dress would arrive in front of an abandoned house, chosen by seemingly arbitrary criteria and unknown reasons, and commence clearing out and loading the furniture and other possessions onto their trucks. They would then light the house on fire and it would burn long into the night. Ten houses would burn at the same time, especially in the Čaršija Old Town, in Miljkovac, Plane, Ankare, on Vila and in Šušnjari.

I observed all of this helplessly from our fifth floor apartment, using my son Bojan's binoculars that he had bought with his own pocket money to observe deer in the forests. Often I couldn't hold my tears back, seeing how in such a destructive, wild, plundering manner, led by the thirst for blood, everything which was earned with hard work and years of time was taken and destroyed in such a way. In my life those images would become a wound that could never be healed, that would constantly be picked at and sore.

150 The flag of Republika Srpska: red-blue-white, is almost identical to the civil flag of Serbia, but with a different aspect ratio of 1:2 instead of 2:3 and slightly different colour shades.

Crows

From the local radio station, more and more often one can hear announcements by Milovan Stanković, the newly elected commander of the town, along with announcements by his newly formed Crisis Headquarters the head of which is Boro Paravac, who until recently was the director of the Executive Committee of the Municipality Assembly. They are calling for all men aged 18-55 to register for *recruitment* at the Yugoslav National Army Centre, by this or that date at latest. Otherwise, they are warned, "they will have all their possessions and assets confiscated and will be punished with the utmost severity".

On the front lawn, between the Yugoslav National Army Centre and the park, three machine gun nests, constructed with bags of sand, are making us scared. They are empty! They seem to have been made unnecessarily there. More than a hundred people are standing in a queue that starts at the entrance to the Centre and goes all the way to "Lesnina" and "Borovo", the shops that aren't open any more, and probably won't ever be open again. People are patiently waiting to be recruited. The curfew, implemented straight after the occupation, allows civilians to move freely between 8 and 11 am, but now it is extended to 5 pm, to allow for the registration.

I am watching those standing in line, mostly all familiar faces, friends, people from our town. I am on friendly terms with most of them. Information is being passed quietly, timidly. Maybe there's an informer amongst them? Almost everyone is talking about the horrors that have happened in the past few days: who has been slaughtered, killed, robbed, imprisoned, beaten, exiled, physically abused... Many are taken aback by the events. Some found it hard to leave everything and flee their town. They thought they could be loyal to the new authorities and keep whatever they had. They didn't realise that the reason why the new "authorities" came into power was to loot and plunder.

Rumour has it that billions of Dinars[151] belonging to private business owners kept in SDK[152] bank accounts are disappearing overnight. People say that the Crisis Committee is taking it. There are many educated, wealthy,

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151 Dinar was the national currency of the Former Yugoslavia. In the early 1990s, hyper-inflation led to printing large amounts of money so that an average worker's salary would come to several billions of dinars. That amount would suffice only for basic household expenses.

152 SDK – Social Accounting Service – a government institution for auditing and monitoring the financial transactions in the business sector

cultured, supposedly clever people, "Downtown people", urban people... but in vain! Very few are anticipating the real hell that is yet to come, that nothing has finished yet, and that in fact it has only just begun. They don't comprehend the inconceivable massacres, looting, terror, exiles, that are yet to come, everything is planned to ensure that the non-Serb population leave those parts forever and never dream of coming back. As if all the horrors happening to their neighbours[153] aren't the same horrors that could befall them as well, and they aren't aware that this is just a warning, that it is organized fear mongering, ultimately leading to a mass exodus.

I see two soldiers in camouflage standing in the National Heroes' Park across the road from the Centre. They are armed with automatic weapons hitched on their backs, cartridge belts across their shoulders. One is wearing a red beret, the other is wearing a Montenegrin national cap on his head. They are holding hunting guns, shooting at crows and jackdaws in the trees throughout the park. They are aiming well, while the birds are in flight. I had been hearing the shooting for a few days already and was wondering what it was. Now I see. I don't think it is a coincidence. The poor birds must think they are safest in the city centre. Terrified by the explosions in the Old Town, the crows migrated from the poplars near the town market place down to the centre, to the park trees. They are squawking and continuing to join the others, even though dozens already lie dead on the grass. They don't know what to do, either they can't or won't leave, just like the people waiting in this line.

I notice that those at whom the first call for mobilisation was aimed did not turn up. There is no hint of their whereabouts. Some who had received weapons earlier "in due time", to "defend" themselves, and to assist in creating "their own" country are also missing. Either they are hiding or have run away, weapons cast away or sold, and this "country" was counting on them. Even though they are honourable exceptions, the Crisis Headquaters is furious, Stanković is threatening, and Mićo Ninković announces that it is high time for everyone to start thinking with their "Serbian head".

On my way home, by the building nicknamed the "Banana", I bump into Drago Ljubičić, who is in a rush to get to Kibernetika[154] where the "Army Department" of the new Serbian municipality has been set up. A few steps behind

153 This is the reference to the war in Croatia which started in 1991 and was going on during 1992 when similar events were happening in Doboj but people did not recognize any connections between events in these two neighbouring countries.

154 A business company in Doboj

him, a peasant woman from a village near the foot of the Ozren mountain, in her peasant clothes, is struggling behind, clumsily handling an M-48 gun with its rifle pulley dragging on the ground, and almost shouting at him: "...and he left it with me, and I don't know what to do with it! He should shove his gun up his ass!"

"We'll sort it out, don't worry!" Drago replies, the new president of one of many newly founded Serbian municipalities springing up in Bosnia.

Vaso on Saint Anthony's Day

It was the feast of Saint Anthony, about six in the evening of that year, ninety-two, when someone came banging on our front door. We haven't had electricity for a few days now and the doorbell isn't working. We are not expecting anybody. It was during the curfew. *Civilians* were only allowed to be out during the hours between 8 and 11 am. Aside from those designated hours, it was forbidden to go anywhere. We socialized with those who lived in our building. At that very moment, our neighbour Marko from upstairs was "our guest". My wife opened the door when four fully armed men in blue camouflage uniforms pushed her aside and marched in. They weren't wearing caps but on their left hand sleeves was a clear emblem, red, blue and white, with the Cyrillic script stating: *Police of SAO Krajina*[155]. That was the first time in my life someone had entered our apartment against our will. The leader of the group demanded to see our identification, glanced at my ID card and threw it on the floor.

"Fuck you, you fucking ustaša! Haven't you left yet?" he screamed at me.

He continued while we were gathering our wits.

"Give me your wallet! Money, foreign currency, gold! Take that off!" He indicated towards my wife's gold necklace hanging around her neck. "And rings, wedding rings! Everything!"

We were mute. While we exchanged glances, not believing what was happening right before our eyes, they had already removed our neighbour Marko's watch, tore off his wedding ring, took banknotes from his wallet. A member of the group placed the barrel of a gun against his forehead, then turned to my underage son.

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155 SAO Krajina – the so-called Serbian Autonomous Territory Krajina, a Serb occupied territory in Croatia where the 1991 war had commenced under pretense that they had been fighting for freedom of the national Serb minority in Croatia

"What do you think about me killing him right now?" he said.

"Don't! Why?" Cried the child. The armed man pulled the trigger. The "magnum" *clicked* – it was empty. Then, seemingly insane, he said to my son.

"Oh boy, are you a little ustaša?"

When Bojan said he wasn't, the man, looking crazy, said, "You will be! You will be!"

We were watching helplessly. Then one of the thinner soldiers who wore glasses said,"Come on Vaso! Enough!" and pushed him towards the door.

"When I'm back I'll open a wristwatch boutique!" said Vaso as he walked out, looking at Marko's golden watch.

They carried on. One of them was reading names from the tenants' list formerly used by the president of the House Council for calculation of communal water and electricity bills in the building. The names of the people on that list who they had permission to steal from were circled, so that there wouldn't be any misunderstandings. They didn't enter my first neighbour's apartment at all.

Radnička Street[156]

The so called "Workers' Street" lived up to its name, with the one storey houses built with a worker's mortgage and modest salaries, surrounded by small gardens, flowerbeds, yards, exuding the mindset of the people inhabiting it. My family was tightly bound to that street and number 76 was owned by my wife's family, where she had also grown up.

When in May of 1992 the town was violently occupied and pronounced as Serbian territory by the SDP[157], our house in Radnička street was empty. We had our apartment elsewhere where we lived so I would only occasionally venture, circumstances permitting, to check if anybody had illegally taken up residence in it, which would happen quite often. In an attempt to prevent this from happening to us, I had asked a colleague I used to work with to temporarily move in as he had nowhere to live at the time. We would often spend some time under grandpa's great oak tree. I would quickly inspect the garden that my wife and I had tried to maintain, inspired by the efforts of her

156 This translates as "Workers' street"

157 Serbian Democratic Party

parents. Somehow I couldn't shake the dark suspicion that we would have to flee before the garden bore fruit. In response to my complaints of constant harassment in our apartment from the Serbian soldiers, our first neighbours in Radnička street said that they had so far been left alone and were living relatively peacefully.

After the final instance of harassment, humiliation and theft that we experienced in our apartment, we moved to the Radnička house the very next day. My colleague Radovan, who was already living there, had his own room, and we moved into the other available rooms. From our apartment in the multistorey building we disappeared for an "unspecified period of time". We would turn up to take some things occasionally, mostly the leftover food, clothes, and suitcases that my wife and son finally agreed to pack for our one-way trip. Every time we would briefly go back to our place, I felt uncomfortable, as if I were in someone else's apartment, as if at any moment someone would come banging on the door.

On Radnička street we lived almost illegally. Few knew, save a few relatives, where we were. We were practically in hiding as it wasn't a good idea to have more than a handful of people know where you were. Our house was nestled about fifty meters from the road and was concealed from the view around the back by a tall hedge. The positioning of the house, the hedge and greenery that was all around, made it seem almost hidden. I had earlier hidden our car there as well, between the neighbour's hedge and some pine trees, planted some fifteen years earlier by myself and grandpa, in the shape of "school", as he used to say. I'd brought the pines from Preslica, as small as pencils, intending to plant them by my holiday home, but as they grew robustly, we didn't want to disturb them, so they remained at that house in Radnička and quickly grew to be taller than I was.

...I am listening to the news report claiming that the so-called Yugoslav National Army isn't involved in the aggression of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and at the same time I can see and hear how MIG[158] planes are flying over our town and cluster bombs are raining down on the Tešanj region where some of my cousins live. And at the same time, the journalist Mirudin A. is announcing on the radio from the "liberated territories" that our occupied town was "almost liberated", believed only by the first neighbour, right up until the Serbian army took all of his metalwork tools that he had inherited from his deceased father. He grieved the loss of an anvil most of all as he had inherited

158 military fighter aircrafts

it from his great-grandfather. Despite the dwindling supplies, we even managed to drink some rakija two or three times. Our neighbour was Smajo and his house directly faced ours. He was found most often sitting in the shed with slightly open door, mixing cigarette tabacco (that I managed to procure for him from time to time) with leaves and grass. He would smoke half of that awful cigarette, and then always exclaim, "This is no good! No good!"

Food was becoming scarce, not to mention the lack of other basic neccessities. There was no running water or electricity. We had some money, mostly thanks to foreign currencies we had saved for dire times, which were now upon us. We could still find potatoes, and they were cheap, probably because they were harvested by inmates and other prisoners in concentration camps. We tried to make the most of every opportunity to shop at the local supermarkets "Promex" and "Omnikom". The local villagers would occasionally bring some produce to the local market, but the non-Serbs were beaten and dismissed. Only the Serbs could safely buy and sell. Constant identification checks of people are carried out. The tomatoes in our garden bore many fruits that season and we tried to water it regularly with water from Smajo's well, but it was getting harder and harder. No more bread. One could only buy it at the town bakery which eventually closed as they said they had run out of fuel. The private bakeries dotted throughout Doboj closed the day after the initial occupation. We heard that all their stores of flour had been confiscated. I can't forget my dear mother. I try to bring her what I can but unfortunately my visits are becoming less frequent. It is getting more and more dangerous to walk around the town despite the curfew being extended to 5 pm.

I sleep on the couch in the room closest to the main road, window open, my eyes half closed, my ears pricked for any noise. We go to sleep early as there is no electricity. But there can be no sleep. Every night I expect to hear a car skidding to a halt in front of the house, the thud of soldier's boots echoing in the front lane, the banging with gunstocks on the front door.

Night and day are filled with fear. At night I can't sleep, during the day I am terrified. Every day upon returning from my unsuccessful search for food, as I turn off the road to the path leading to the house, I am filled with dread whether I will find my wife and son alive or dead. We had already heard of horrifying stories happening to people: the brother of my good friend Esad was beheaded in his own apartment, as well as Emir's parents in the Old Town, and Sajda Hidić, a former colleague in the Ćuprijska Street. My best man and his wife Mato and Kata Kopčić were bound with a wire and

burned alive in their house in Makljenovac. My father's old colleague Franjo Majetić, known for his hunting and fishing, was also beheaded in his house in Miloš Kupres Street.

Grenades, from a southerly direction, started raining on the town more and more often. They weren't intended to assist the infantry occupation of the town but to instil fear and restlessness. During those situations the whole street would hide in Smajo's cellar, which we believed to be the safest place, also serving a double purpose as a kitchen where we would cook food and bake bread. And not just us. Half of the neighbourhood would arrive in the mornings bringing and taking away with them numerous pots and pans. Various pies, breads, pastries would be baked, and long beans, potato stews and sataraš[159] would be cooked. We got our supply of water from a hand pump in the garden. The small hand pump which was who knows how old, with pipes dug haphazardly into the ground, about five or six meters in length, was more important to us at that time than the municipal water supply which wasn't functioning. While I was still living in my illusions, I claimed that if this country resembled anything serious, it would at least plant some water pumps in the town so the residents wouldn't be thirsty. Ironically, thirst forced even Serbs - the officially recognised residents of this non-country - to come to Smajo's pump. The soldiers threatened Smajo that if he let anyone use the pump after 5 pm he would suffer the consequences. He told me this with tears in his eyes and wondered how he could say no to people in need of water. Even in the few business companies which still operated, water for the workers' canteen was brought from small, privately owned manual water pumps. There was of course no electricity at all.

One day I heard how suddenly, in just a few days of fighting, Bosanska Posavina had fallen. I overhead a conversation by some Serb soldiers who were back from the frontlines and they described how they advanced so quickly that they hadn't had time to reach the defenders of the places they had been attacking, so they entered already abandoned places. The Serbs were led by experienced army officials from the ex-Yugoslav army, the General Lisica and Colonel Simić. Five days after the big battle for the "Corridor of Life" commenced, they were assisted by the soldiers from SAO Krajina[160],

159 Sataraš – a summery stew consisting of peppers, onions, tomatoes and other seasonal vegetables.

160 various (mostly paramilitary) army forces from the Serbian Autonomous Territory Krajina already fighting in Croatia

led by General Talić and Milan Martić. They had previously organized a systematic sacking of the city on the 13th of June. The fact that the helicopters were landing relatively frequently on the playground near the primary school ("Narodni heroji")[161] carrying their wounded soldiers was proof that things weren't going as smoothly as they had hoped. The stadium of the football club "Sloga"[162] also served as a heliodrome, but it was reserved for the larger helicopters carrying dead bodies. The helicopter flights were most frequent during the battles for Modriča and Odžak. After thirty-eight days, the Serbian army forced itself out to the river Sava at Svilaj and the town Bosanski Brod would be occupied three months later. With the fall of Odžak[163] on the 13th of July 1992, the conditions for opening the "corridor" towards Serbia, as it was called, were met and transit in both directions became more accessible. Surprisingly, this wasn't referred to as a road to Yugoslavia, rather it was said that the roads "towards Serbia were unencumbered and clear". Even before the official opening of the "corridor" towards Serbia, the supply of goods in the town was becoming seemingly better, thanks to the huge variety of the looted goods from Johovac, Kotorsko, Plehan, Derventa. Everything was for sale. Aside from other things, a large collection of uniforms belonging to the Zbor narodne garde (ZNG)[164] and Hrvatskog vijeća obrane (HVO)[165] were now worn by the Serbian army. They even took the boots and hats from soldiers from National Guard Corps. Only their caps featured the Serbian tricoloured symbols. When the connections with Serbia became safer, more food and home goods started arriving. One could find tinned meat, cured meats, French toothpaste. A bottle of rakija from Prokuplje cost a quarter of a decent monthly salary. I believe a lot of those items came from humanitarian aid.

The transit between Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina became more significant as there was another way out of the occupied zone. The Red Cross, which had been stationed at the High School Centre "Đuro Pucar Stari"[166] for some time now, affirmed its status as an organization which could enable non-

161 English translation "National Heroes", the school got its name after five partisans – members of the liberation army forces during the Second World War – lost their lives in the battle

162 English translation "Harmony"

163 Two towns near Doboj for which Doboj was the regional administrative centre

164 ZNG - National Guard Corps

165 Croat Armed Forces within Bosnia and Herzegovina

166 Đuro Pucar Stari was a Yugoslav and Bosnian national hero, a Partisan who fought during the Second World War and who after the war held several high positions in the government

Serbs to successfully leave the town. In fact, it was forced migration from the town, known as a "swapping" strategy. The so called "swapping" was happening in two directions: south towards Tešanj and west towards Stanari, Vučjak, Prnjavor, and Dragalići (near Bosanska Gradiška). Random people would compile lists, supposedly based on information obtained from the Red Cross - which was clearly a lie - and would be lined up in the hall of the High School Centre near the entrance, up to a day or two before their bus was meant to leave. Ultimately people would be driven off to be "swapped". So, in the general direction of Tešanj (and further on towards central Bosnia) and in the direction of Dragalići (towards the Republic of Croatia) the forced migration of non-Serbian citizens was taking place, blessed by the general overseer, the Red Cross. There was also a third exit from this town which was turned into a concentration camp. It led through Svjetliča towards Gračanica, further on towards Tuzla, and was considered a backup solution, and this route was manoeuvred by some people unknown to me. They let refugees in over the bridge on the Spreča river asking for large sums of money in return. I heard an infamous četnik vojvoda[167], known by the name of Jorga, was among them.

The threats, abuse, and fear mongering of the non-Serb citizens was just escalating, so the price of leaving kept rising. In order to leave, people would sign off or renounce literally everything: their liquid and fixed assets, promises of no return, officially renouncing their residency in the police station and reapplying for residency elsewhere. Then there was a fourth exit route, a corridor towards Serbia, and for most an escape route towards "third countries". This exit seemed the safest, but one had to have very good connections and a lot of money. People would wear army uniforms, turn up with falsified papers, fake permits for international business travel, and otherwise creative solutions to disappear from here as it became clearer with each passing day that non-Serbs wouldn't survive here.

Eventually, some information from the official meetings of the bodies that governed the town was leaked (intentionally or unintentionally) and it was revealed that all of the non-Serb population would have to leave. Even a deadline of 48 hours was mentioned, but apparently thanks to some "moderate forces" in the Crisis Headquarters, the exodus was extended usually to about seven days. Then one would hear new information, that the deadline has been fixed: by November this year. In front of the restaurant Ozren, I met my friend

167 Serbian self-proclaimed title of duke, used in an army hierarchy rather than in a class or socio-economic context.

Dejan, the son of Dr. Miodrag Joldić. He was wearing a camouflage uniform and was armed with a handgun. He was walking out of the fićo[168] on which was written "Elektrodistribucija"[169]. I had known Dejan well ever since we were boys. His father had moved here years ago from Loznica and he was one of the first and one of the best dentists in our town. From the very beginning he was a supporter of the Serbian Democratic Party[170] and now he was a member of the parliament, firstly the one within Bosnia and Herzegovina, and then in the "separatist" state of Republika Srpska. He was one of the loudest members in the Crisis Headquarters regarding the forced exodus of the non-Serb population. I was now seeing Dejan for the first time since the beginning of the occupation and without meandering too much, I asked him directly:

"Okay, Dejan, do you know anything about these rumours, that everyone who is non-Serb will have to move out? I've heard that there are even some dates by which one has to leave and that your father is one of the loudest proponents. I just want to know if the deadline is fixed and if it will be an organized operation?"

It was hard to gauge whether Dejan was surprised by my forward approach and direct question, but all he said was that he didn't know anything and that he would let me know if he found anything out. However, if I needed him for anything, I could find him in the "Electrical Distribution Company", where he was now the offical representative of the company. I never saw him again, nor did he contact me, and the electricity completely disappeared "indefinitely", as was said.

With enormous difficulty I started discussing our imminent departure with my family. My mother unconvincingly told me that she wished to remain with her eldest son. Franjo, as the eldest, advised us to leave as we had children, and said he would stay with our mother. My dear brother, whose chronically ill wife was a Serbian, still didn't comprehend the complexity of the situation in which we found ourselves. He looked at me in surprise when I begged him, crying, to leave together, as there was no other way.

The way out towards Tešanj and Gračanica I hadn't considered as a suitable option from the very beginning as I knew it would end up being a war "all

168 A very popular supermini car, a version of the Italian Fiat 600, made by a Serbian motorcar factory and from 1962 branded as Fiat 750 – "fićo"

169 Electrical Distribution company

170 Despite the alluring acronym, an ultra-right wing nationalist party still active in the region of Republika Srpska in Bosnia and Herzegovina

against all", and that it would be safest to get away as far as possible, which would have been difficult from these two towns. We feared most of all for our child. I considered sending our son somehow to Serbia, to give him all the money that we had until he was settled, and to help him leave the country with the assistance of some foreign embassy. My wife and I would find a way somehow. For something like that there was a theoretical chance of success. I begged friends and acquaintances to help me. Nothing! The bus routes towards Belgrade and Novi Sad were open, one bus per day. However, soon we started to hear of the ill manner in which non-Serbs were being treated, those who dared to get on the buses, if they even managed somehow to get the permits required to leave the town. On one hand, they wanted you to get out, to disappear, and on the other hand, they created obstacles and made it impossible. Therefore, this was our only option: pay to be let out, or stay and wait until they kill you! It would have been quite difficult for me to even get to the bus station because of my name, let alone to the train station. Our town, once the second largest train network in ex-Yugoslavia, was reduced to only two trains, going towards Banja Luka and back. Even they weren't on time. This was a concentration camp! Hell! Damnation!

Finally, I go back to the best solution apparent – the Red Cross one. Of course, that one wasn't easy either, as we found out that apparently around five thousand people are on a waiting list for the "exchange". While we were allowed out within curfew hours, there was always a crowd of people heading down the street of JNA[171] towards the High School Centre and the Red Cross where they searched for guarantor papers which their relatives would send them via the Red Cross to get on the waiting list for the "exchange". Others searched for missing relatives of which they had no information. A third group could be found offering an exchange of their property, either a house or an apartment, for a place "literally anywhere in Croatia". The offer for the "house swap" in Radnička street we gave via an "agency" run by a guy named Pivaš. It was a small, always packed space in the High School Centre "Đuro Pucar Stari", and a label was on the door, stuck on by hand, which read: "Exchange of houses and apartments". We filled in a form and offered our house for a house somewhere in Croatia. Surprisingly, we soon received a visit from a young woman who offered us her own home in Josipdol near Karlovac, with a lot of land. She said it was nice there until the war started, and her husband was in the military so he "left with his men and

171 JNA – Yugoslav National Army

came to Bosnia". We also, apparently, had an offer for an apartment in Velika Gorica. As we couldn't verify anything due to the fact that neither telephones nor postal services were functioning and things were getting more and more tense, we withdrew our offer from the Red Cross. More often than not people who were found to have offered their place for an exchange were forced out of their homes before they had even had a chance to officially exchange their property and move out. They were forced out, robbed, abused often the night before of their scheduled departure, when they had already packed everything they had in the two suitcases they could actually take with them.

Some people could intervene to make sure you were on the list for the "exchange". I knew all of them, but now it was hard to get in contact with them, and if you finally did, there was no use. They didn't want to help, claiming that someone else was sorting it all out. One day a friend advised me to contact S. I had helped that person out in the past as well. We worked in the same company for many years. Now he was working at the Red Cross. While I was looking for him, I encountered many other acquaintances: Velimir, the reserve captain officer of the Yugoslav National Army, the ex-director of the Mechanical-Engineering School, Đoko, an Olympic Gold-medalist in handball, Novak, Željko and Nogo reserve officers from the old Municipal Headquarters for Territorial Defense. They were all mobilised in the Serbian army, but surprisingly, none of them showed any reservation or hesitancy. One couldn't pick up on any sense of awkwardness, guilt or at least confusion because of what has been happening. S. looked at all of this from a different angle and understood instantly what I asked of him.

"You know, it's hard! I'll try but I can't promise anything," he said to me.

He really did try but the pressure was enormous. He even came to our home to tell us that we are not on the list yet, but that the next departure had been delayed and that he'd try to do something next time. And to my surprise, I actually saw some people returning as their buses hadn't departed because a "proper exchange" had not been organised.

We still don't have water or electricity, the telephone landlines aren't working, the post office is defunct. The only connection with the outer world is thanks to radio-amateurs who are sending and receiving messages, everything under the strict surveillance of the "authorities" and we are hearing stories more often of those being assaulted while waiting for messages. Many are beaten by Serbian soldiers. The post office eventually acquires two telephone callboxes for the non-Serb civilians, but only a few lucky individuals, after

hours of waiting in a queue, actually get an opportunity to use them. We listen to the news using a small transistor radio which works on telephone batteries and which I received from my brother. When the batteries lost power, we charged them with the help of a hand dynamo electric generator.

I offered S. the money but he refused, saying, "The best option for you is to leave your car to the Red Cross, and that way I'll be able to push you up the list. Did you consider staying? There isn't as much assault and abuse as before. Many from our company are leaving Filip, Mijo, Jozo, Mirko..."

I could see tears in his eyes.

"My son is 18! You can see this won't end well. I'd prefer to leave like this, rather than being packed onto a freight wagon and deported."

"I heard that in Croatia they are mobilizing all of you who have fled and sending you straight to the battle frontline. Make sure you hide the money you take with you; the last group that left apparently weren't very lucky and had everything stolen off them at the border."

"We're going to Germany," I told him, not believing for a second what I was saying.

It is true that I had a personal connection who could help me sending the guarantor letter that would eventually aid us in our escape to the "third countries". However, there was no feedback. In the end, I took his advice and wrote a hand written declaration, that I, Andrija Kovač, concede my car, registration number DO 023-323, to the Red Cross for their operations. I had a flashback of a special saying that we as children had reserved for football matches with unsuccessful goals or unresolved issues: "let it be for the Red Cross!".

Now, about forty years later, I understand, and am experiencing the true meaning of those words.

I met with S. at the Council building to verify my declaration. The brand new "lady officer" at the desk, feeling very important, verified the declaration and asked in amazement, "TWO copies?"

As she was young and inexperienced, she didn't realise that she had revealed a practice that had been going on: that those declarations were being done in only a single copy so that no trace of it could be found later on.

"Two," S. replied, "One for me, one for him!"

When we were about to go our separate ways, he said to me, "When you're on the list again, I'll come to pick up the car."

And that is how it was. The car that we had worked so hard to buy had already been transferred in the vicinity of the company I had been working for where it would be safe from thieves. After a few more attempts, we found ourselves on the official list for the exchange. We had twenty-four hours before we had to leave. I said goodbye to my old work colleagues who were on duty (mandatory work) at the time, took my car from the place where I had left it temporarily, and gave it to S.

Unfortunately, that last evening in Radnička street, things almost went steeply downhill. For the first time there were house searches in our street, and a list of inhabitants was recorded. I could see the two groups "working" from afar. One was headed by Bato, the inspector of the city police force, and the second by my recent work colleague Brane. Together we had had hundreds of coffees, and lately he had taken to telling me that he didn't like what the boys (meaning "četniks") in the village of Svjetliča were doing. It was a pure coincidence that Brane was in charge of the list-making at our house in Radnička street, followed by two armed underaged village boys, dressed in camouflage uniforms. He was also in a bluish camouflage outfit, the kind that the Serbian police had started to wear lately. Brane was very surprised when he saw me, and exclaimed:

"Andro! What are you doing here?"

He knew that I had an apartment from the factory, and he had previously begged me to rent out this house to him as he hadn't received an apartment. He offered to shake my hand and while we were shaking hands, one of those boys that was with him, not awaiting my response, said, "He was kicked out, surely!"

"No," I replied, mostly to Brane, not paying attention to the young "assistants". "The lift wasn't working, there was no electricity or water. Here I have a shed, coal, firewood, so we can make our own fire, and we have water from the well."

I tried to think of even more reasons.

"What are you?" Asked the other armed lad, interrupting my thoughts.

I didn't really give the question much attention, nor to the boy asking the question. I watched Brane, wondering what he now thought of "boys from his village", and if these two were an example.

"Andro? Andrija? Croatian! What else could he be!" The other boy concluded quickly.

"Andrija is Croatian, and Nada is Serbian!" Brane explained, as if in school.

Suddenly there was a short silence. Despite the fact that we had known each other for years, he apparently didn't know that my wife wasn't, in fact, Serbian. I didn't say anything as the boys had started questioning my son, why he hadn't registered for mobilization yet, to which he answered, not being able to hold his tongue as always:

"I don't want to shoot anyone!"

"Oh really", both sneered. "How come we can?"

My wife and I tried to smooth things over, saying that he was still in school, that he had just finished year eleven, which of course wasn't a real excuse. Then Brane turned to them.

"Let's go, Karaga!"

I realised he was calling him that in jest. The boys had come to the house for the house search and "Karaga"[172] had been insistent, speaking to my wife as if she were a "Serb" mother.

"Send him, madam, tomorrow to register! We have a right to take him with us straight away!" He concluded decisively.

It was already dark, and because there was no electricity, one couldn't actually see anything in the house, not even the bags packed, ready for our departure the next day. Brane left with his village boys, and my wife was very anxious for our son, probably more than was necessary at that moment. It was just the last drop to overflow the glass of bitterness. It was just one more reason to go.

Take my guitar

I'm leaving, probably forever, but I can't actually believe it. I know how hard my wife is taking it. I'm leaving her when I am most needed, but I don't have any other options. I have to do this, for my son, and because of everything that is yet to happen, and to prevent further heartbreak for my mother. Fascism has no boundaries, that much I know from the last war. One can destroy it either with force or with ultimate unity, and neither of those will come into being here for a long while yet. With my name and surname[173] I am practically

172 Karaga was one of the most well-known brutal Serb individuals from Doboj, so this nickname refers to being similar to "patriotic and powerful" Serbs from the town

173 In the Balkans one can usually immediately guess which "tribe" or "ethnicity" one belongs to by their name, whether it is characteristically "catholic" sounding, "orthodox" sounding or "muslim" sounding.

half dead. I can feel it in the looks people give me as they pass me by. At the end of the day my life doesn't matter anyway, but how could I live if something happened to my loved ones?

From the doorway I saw my mother leaving the kitchen and heading towards the five sided table intended for guests, in the middle of the front room.

"Mum, I came to say goodbye."

She fell to the chair and burst into tears.

"My son! You're leaving?"

"Don't cry, please, mother. I'll come back as soon as I take care of my wife and son."

I tell her I'll be back in three or four months to comfort her, even though I don't actually believe it myself. Mother knew we were leaving. She had already said that she didn't want to leave her house, that she wished to stay, and whatever happens, happens. That morning I had stopped by a few times already, bringing over the little leftover food we had stored away. I don't even know what she said to me as we embraced for our goodbye, I could only hear the neighbour telling my mum not to worry and that we'd be back soon. I was choking on my tears as I ran down the seven steps where I had, as a baby, taken my first steps. When on the street, I don't know if I looked back at the house of my childhood, and to the window looking into the kitchen where I would often see my mother, or to see the balcony, always full of the flowers she loved so much. If I had turned to look, I wouldn't have seen anything for all the tears anyway. That was one of the most difficult moments of my not-so-easy life, and every time I think back to it, it is harder and harder to process...

My brother and neighbours (who were staying in the city "indefinitely") saw us off to the bus that was to take us to the "exchange". We left the house where we had lived for the past two months. We had already "said goodbye" to our old flat. Ibro and Smajo are going with us, and Senka spilled some water[174] after us for extra good luck. I looked at my house, number 76, for the last time. We all walked in silence, as if we were in a funeral procession. My brother Franjo was pushing his bicycle which had a few bags hanging off it. Ibro and Smajo also carried a bag each, and we carried the rest. All in all, a

174 Spilling some water onto the ground after someone is a superstition that is supposed to bring the person who is walking away from the water good luck.

few bags; too few to carry the weight and history of the family Kovač, starting with my great grandfather's arrival in Bosnia in the year 1900.

I feel humiliated, uncomfortable, and ashamed, as we walk from the Usora suburb. There is a crowd of a few hundred gathered in front of the High School Centre, people who have come to say goodbye to their loved ones. For us, the ones leaving, two buses are waiting, having arrived after a serious delay. We had already paid for our tickets, three times twenty Serbian dinars, and my old neighbour Miloš Č. is calling us on from a list. We load our luggage and board the bus.

Many people are surrounding the bus and are begging us to take various letters and parcels for their friends and family when we arrive at our destination. No one knows where we are going, or whether we will make it at all, not even us. Everyone is holding onto a sliver of hope, that someone will come to get them out of all this. We take a few of the letters, messages, and phone numbers.

"Please call them, find them, beg them to get us out of here!" This is what most of the short messages say. Some of the nicer messages that we should pass on - coming from unyielding optimists who have chosen to stay and want to comfort their loved ones - sound something like, "We are alive and well! Don't worry about us!"

I don't know how I said goodbye to my brother. It was hard for both of us. My eyes were brimming with tears and red from so much crying. I gave him the rest of the Serbian dinars that I had, and he jokingly asked me what he was going to do with all the money. He didn't understand that they would soon genuinely become worthless pieces of paper unless he spent it as soon as possible. Then he stuffed a note in my pocket, one hundred German Marks, saying,

"Take this. You don't know when you might need it."

Tears were streaming down the face of Franjo's wife Dragica. Somehow I managed to pull myself together. I said goodbye to everyone, conversed matter-of-factly, took all the letters and received all the messages to pass on. It was hard to gauge what was going on behind my dark sunglasses. My wife was sobbing. Our young son, who had recently turned eighteen, was saying goodbye to his girlfriend, who was a Muslim. Her eyes swelled with tears when I asked her,

"Will you join us if we send you the documentation via the Red Cross?"

"I will!" She nodded her head and burst into tears, crying inconsolably.

We left, finally, after a delay of almost two hours. It was just before noon, and had it in fact been noon, we wouldn't've heard the bells ringing from the church of Sacred Jesus' Heart as it had already been demolished. If the bell tower hadn't been blown up by grenades and mines, there wouldn't be anyone to ring the bells anyway. In Tito Street, in front of the Police Station, the bus stopped briefly and there my son saw the famous Doboj musician Vlado Vukojević Baja whom he idolized.

"Mister Vlado! Mister Vlado! Take my guitar, if you need it! It's at Uncle Franjo's house!" he called out to him.

And that is how, on Tuesday the 25th of August 1992, we left the town that had once been ours. Our Doboj.

At the border

There was an eerie silence on the bus, as if we were heading to a funeral or graveyard. At the fish restaurant Ribnjak in Rudanka we turned onto the country road towards Stanari. In Dragalovci, the only Croatian majority village in those parts, we saw the first images of true war: smashed windows, façades covered in bullet holes. Deserted. No one to be seen!

We passed through Kulaši, then through Vučijak, my father's part of the world, from which the family Kovács was exiled in the previous war, the last world war. Now in this war, the Bosnian war, I am being exiled. Is there an end to this? History is repeating itself – the looting and extortion are being repeated.

We were stopped a few times by armed persons, but no one entered the bus. Near Klašnice we turned right, heading north towards Bosanska Gradiška. When we arrived at the Sava river, we found the bridge that had once connected Bosnia and Croatia had been demolished and it had collapsed. The Serbian police ordered us to get off the bus, then they would do a roll call, inspect us and our belongings, and then let us board again. They told us that no one was allowed to have more than three hundred German Marks on them, that no technical equipment, video or audio equipment must be transported across the border, and if they found three undeclared items, the whole bus would be sent back to Doboj. They then proceeded with the "border control" on this newly

established, so-called international border. The "representatives" from the Red Cross who had been leading us up to that point had suddenly disappeared. The atmosphere was tense until the moment when one of the passengers had all of his gold jewellery confiscated, which he had declared as family heirlooms. He was told that this was not allowed. The "border police" got distracted by the gold, most likely caught up with how they would divide it amongst themselves, and the atmosphere relaxed a bit. The whole process started speeding up. The "policeman", however, continued to address us in his dark and cynical manner.

"Let's see then, brother Serb, what you have there?"

My "brother Serb" confiscated my son's computer which had meant more to him than the thousand Marks we had paid for it at the time. Was that finally the last thing they would take from us? When I believed for a moment that it was, I was quickly proven wrong. The robbery would continue for decades. Our homes, schools, factories, hospitals, and everything else would be taken away from us.

We somehow survived, got over the border, and arrived at Dragalići for the "exchange". On that no man's land, monitored by UN officials from Nepal, only the ruins of the Energoinvest petrol station remained. During the whole "exchange", all I saw were two dead bodies being transferred from one truck onto another. On the Croatian side, some soldiers were searching for people on their lists, but they weren't there. The lists for "leaving" were being compiled at a completely different place under different conditions in such a way that the Croatians of course couldn't know.

We waited for a few painful hours in constant fear of being sent back as no one was coming to pick us up from the Croatian side. Finally, things started getting better. Zoran arrived, the representative from the Red Cross in Doboj. He announced that these exchanges wouldn't happen anymore as the Croatians hadn't kept their part of the deal – how could it be that there were no Serbs from Croatia to be exchanged? He said his bit and wished us a safe journey. We got onto the bus that had appeared out of nowhere and we were told it was heading in the direction of Zagreb. Around a hundred people, mostly women and children, exhausted from the stress and anxiety, hungry, thirsty, and boiling in the summer heat, got on the bus. Inside there were about fifty seats, and a hundred of us – a hundred souls, a hundred destinies, a hundred tragedies, all with one desire – to leave this hell and get as far away as possible! On the road there were about thirty people left over who couldn't

cram onto the bus, so they had to stay behind and wait for something else. Who knows what happened to them.

We were driving along the highway in the Republic of Croatia, only it is not quite that yet as it is occupied by Serbia. The Highway of Bratstvo-jedinstvo[175] seems ghostly – there isn't a living soul to be seen. We didn't encounter a single vehicle. Upon entering the free parts of Croatia, we had to stop. Few of us realized that this was now a different country and that we couldn't just pass through as we used to do in the past. The men, military conscripts, were listed. Our friend Kemo, from the Doboj Club, had given us some papers stating that we were only visiting Croatia for one month in order to complete a "medical rehabilitation", and that after that period we would have to contact the 101st HVO Brigade. That was the condition for entering. Again we were faced with uncertainty and waiting around. It was already twilight when the Croatian police granted us entry into the Republic of Croatia. Women started crying! We breathed a sigh of relief!

The bus arrived in Zagreb some time before midnight. On the left side of the road, I recognised the Cvjetno Naselje.[176] They took us in at the students' hostel, banking on Kemo's promise that we would pay for our bills and accommodation and that "we won't be staying long". A wonderful clean room, electricity, hot water was waiting for us – the very opposite of what we had lived through and what we had left behind. It made me even more depressed and worried for my mother and brother, and everyone else who had stayed behind.

Tortured by the fear, anticipation, and long journey, I fell into a deep sleep. In my last waking thoughts, I remember wondering if this was all really happening, and would I wake up tomorrow – a free man?

Epilogue

Andrija Kovač, upon leaving Doboj, stayed in Zagreb for some time before escaping for Stuttgart with his wife Nada where he lived and worked. He stayed in Germany until 1999 when the German government changed their policy towards Bosnian and Herzegovinian refugees. He then received

175 Bratstvo-jedinstvo ironically means Brotherhood – Unity. This highway was built in the Former Yugoslavia, claiming the connection and unity of people from two different ethnic parts of the country, ran from Zagreb (Croatia) to Belgrade (Serbia)

176 A poetic name given to a suburb in Zagreb – the Flowery Suburb

a visa to migrate to Canada where he still lives to this day. Andrija's son Bojan married his girlfriend from Doboj. While in Germany, he managed to sort out her paperwork and they escaped together. In their happy marriage they have two children and Canadian citizenship. The elder brother Franjo didn't have any children. He stayed in Bosnia to care for his wife who was very ill, and for his elderly mother. Not long after the war had finished, she passed away, from sadness and old age. After saying goodbye to his brother, Franjo was arrested for no reason and spent twenty days in jail. Through correspondence with his friends, Andrija learned that "Franjo was arrested by the son of their mother's old friend. No one knew where he had been kept, and when he was released, he was ten kilos thinner, and said he hadn't been fed for days". Near the end of the war, in September of 1995, he was recaptured and sent to do forced labour at the Ozren mountain, digging trenches and carrying ammunition for forty-eight terrible days. He survived the war with traumas he didn't share with anyone. They took years away from his life. He died in the year 2000, exactly a hundred years after their grand-grandfather, István Kovács, had arrived to Bosnia. With Franjo's death, the name Kovač, which they believed belonged there - in their part of the world - disappeared. They had managed to get to a sixth generation before it got to a black full circle. All that remains in Bosnia now are the graves.

The descendants of their family now belong to the whole world – they live in five different countries, on three separate continents.

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Andrija Kovač (Andras Kovacs) is a pseudonym used by the descendant of the Bosnian "kuferaši" when he writes his short stories and essays, acclaimed in the literary realm of exile. This story is a condensed version of several of his short novels: "The Conscription", "Where is Vaso?", "Radnička Street", "Take my guitar", "Homeland", "On the Border". In agreement with the author, some stories have been shortened and adapted in such a way that doesn't take away from the authenticity of the original work. Kovač is currently working on prose concerning his family history, the tragic destiny of the generation that had moved to Bosnia, as well as the events from the war in 1992, and reflections on the past and present. His stories link the family tree with the countries that had risen and fallen during their lifetimes, and the unfortunate position they found themselves in, as foreigners in ultra-

nationalist times, seen as enemies. He has written his truth simply, without judgement or hatred. His prose reveals the essence of all the exiles throughout the Balkans – guerrilla warfare and looting. Through the words of his protagonist - the victim - he has conveyed with lucidity a comparison worth repeating here: "He was left with a scar one has when, after a surgical procedure, the surgeon does a bad job in stitching you back up. The wound ends up healing, but the scar remains there for as long as you're alive". Not wishing to colour his work with any kind of political ideology, the author subtly stresses the tragic delusions of excessive patriotism. Due to his own personal traumas, Andras Kovács (in the new continent now known as Andrew Kovach) for a long time resisted the idea of compiling his memories of the war into a new novel, but his final decision to do it is indeed welcoming news for his audiences. The book is greatly anticipated!

Everything should be written down and published. Forgetting within ourselves also reduces the memory to less painful things, but life is unfortunately made up of more bitterness and heartache, which, as it turned out for us, would determine our path and our destiny.

Review

Testimonies of One's Own Suffering

Bosnia and Herzegovina is a land where everyone co-existed, even during the hardest of times throughout history. Receiving the seed of aggression in Bosnia and Herzegovina meant that this tranquil country and people who had created their own unique unity within diversity, was knocked down by forces outside of Bosnia and Herzegovina, which had been prepared and decisive enough in their intentions. The value system which was the building block for this kind of inclusivity and common life was destroyed. Lies became the foundation of the upcoming ideology. The creators of these lies chose to enforce and repeat them to the point of exhaustion.

A machine was created, a non-human machine, made up of ex-humans, who were directed from the outside, and who satiated their appetites with looting and with feelings of superiority over an unprotected population. The machine was fed by hysteria brought by the media, on a shameless pretence of victimhood of exactly that group of people who embarrassed themselves by adhering to this new ideology, an open space for unpunished thieving and abuse of the worst kind.

The war presents itself in these disturbing and emotional stories and I have to say in my defence that it was extremely difficult, actually almost impossible, to write a review of this book with a sober head. It was basically like holding hot coals in your hands and trying not to show how painful the burn is. And it burns to this day, 30 years after the beginning of the war, the suffering of man, the suffering of people – represented [in the book] by all the peoples, and the author brings them to us respectfully – every instance of suffering belongs to humanity, and every instance reflects the same sorrow, the sorrow that the war happened.

This book testifies to that which is magnificent in Bosnia and Herzegovina – the fact that no one ever extinguished the flame which generated mutual understanding among people, and that nothing is, or ever will be, black and white. There will always be great humans on all sides, and equally there will be non-humans.

The most valuable dimension of this work, in my opinion, is the author's ability to find (scattered throughout the world) examples of people who kept their pre-war humanity, good attitudes towards their neighbours, and care for one's community within their hearts despite external pressures.

We hope that this book will awake the sleepy conscience of those who are still silent. Mirko Jeleč is a Ghandi-like author who calls exclusively for peace, and leaves to the written documents and human destinies to indicate the after-effects of hatred and war. There is no bitterness in this manuscript, nor any kind of impassioned speech. The book has risen above all that and shines with the light of the real destinies of all the different peoples of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The truth during the war, and even more after the war, was multiplied to the level of absurd untruths. Bastions of nationality, on smaller or larger scales, invented their orchestrated media "truths" where they pushed people who had been afflicted by the war, who had lost their houses, their loved ones, and had been forced into exile from their generational hearths.

Ninety-ninety-two destroyed all illusions in Bosnia and Herzegovina, buried the hopes and faith in the beginnings of democratic processes, and opened a cancerous wound that hasn't healed to this day. This year, ninety-ninety-two, to quote the author, laughed in the face of common sense:

"The war arrived in a yellow truck on which 'Progres' was written in large letters".

Mirko Jeleč's book, based on facts, court documentation, testimonies of unbiased witnesses, aims to protect the one and only truth from oblivion, the truth of the ordinary persons exposed to threats, prison, and concentration camps, fearing for their life. This kind of truth, untarnished by political manipulation, is narrated in 25 stories written in simple and clear language.

Ninety-ninety-two is a book which has been missing from Bosnian and Herzegovinian public life. It is documentary prose genre, where the narratives are intertwined with facts, written accounts, and the author's own perspectives of the events. The book is embellished by its moderation, righteousness, truthfulness, and beautiful style. Before us is a work that testifies to the lives and deaths of people from the Doboj region, mostly those who had to leave Doboj, that is, those who left behind testimonies of their own suffering.

Ninety-ninety-two is a book which loves Bosnia and Herzegovina and all her people. This book looks for the best in man, despite their nationality or

religious background. This book is cathartic and cleanses us from hatred, and opens up new levels of understanding. This is a book that will grow with age and by which (despite his other works) we will remember the name of its just and reasoned author, Mirko Jeleč.

Professor Sead Alić, PhD

Sead Alić was born 1956 in Donja Vraca, Zenica. He completed primary school and high school in Doboj. After studying philosophy and Croatistics at the Faculty of Philosophy at the University of Zagreb, he remained in Zagreb where he also achieved note-worthy success as a journalist, publicist, philosopher, a public and cultural worker. He was an editor in the Student newspaper, a host and editor of Radio 101, produced a series of films on democracy, and produced around 30 documentaries, and 120 TV programs. He has a double doctorate: in philosophy and in literature. He has published dozens of books, philosophical, literary and cultural works in various anthologies and scientific journals. Sead Alić is one of the foremost "interpreters" of philosophy and theories of media. In Zagreb, he founded an Institute for the Philosophy of Media and Media Studies. He is the editor-in-chief of the online scientific journal "In media res". He works as an Associate Professor at the North University (Koprivnica/Varaždin). He is the leader of the Class for humanities studies and culture at the International Academy of Science and Arts in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

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Review

A Time of Fear, Crime, and Truth

In his own battle for truth and the language of the people, Vuk Stefanović Karadžić wrote long ago that he "laid out a law for himself, not to praise anyone, nor to scold, not to ridicule, or wonder at, but only to tell it as it is". The journalist, publicist, and subtle story-teller Mirko Jeleč laid out that same law in his book "Ninety-ninety-two": to tell it as it was. With a lot of bravery, knowledge, good will and strength, Mirko Jeleč ventured on this unpredictable and dangerous journey, to truthfully describe and show what was actually happening from the very beginnings of the war in Doboj. When, in the 1990's, the so-called Democratic Parties assumed power, they promised a Wonderland to people and said how Bosnia would be just like Switzerland or Norway – lands of peace and tranquillity. The naïve population believed the lying primitives in power and with a small dose of suspicion expected better days to come, but not the war, crime, and horror that would soon follow.

And so the third of May 1992 came – the liberation or occupation, depending on how the Serbian power-holderx, or the Muslim and Croat leaders described it. "May was in your home town a month brimming with blood and cries", a member of the Red Berets will openly admit to Mirko Jeleč. The Red Berets – they were a unit of specially trained armed forces from Serbia who, with the help of the army officials of the ex-Yugoslav army, occupied Doboj and a few other places in Bosnia, and began their reign of terror, spreading fear and hatred, committing crimes against the Muslims, Croats and unfavourable Serbs as well. According to the agreement made between Slobodan Milošević, Franjo Tuđman, and Alija Izetbegović, the military and paramilitary, special forces and paraspecial forces, police and parapolice, did that which was imagined by these three self-proclaimed democratic leaders: to divide Bosnia into their own "pens" and cursed backyards, giving unlimited power to their arrogant and powerful armies.

"From the very first day when we had seized power in Doboj, we were arresting, interrogating, and beating everyone on the street and in the jails;

four soldiers from special forces raped a little girl in front of her mother", says a special forces fighter from the Red Berets. This is just another proof that when a (non)human has unlimited power, a bloodthirsty beast emerges and all the forcefulness and hatred comes into the light.

How did the special forces, army, and police manage to take over the power so quickly and bring their reign of terror? The answer is already in the aforementioned testimony of the special forces soldier: with fear. "All the police in the world know that fear is their ally: it betrays friends, creates informants, makes the great feel small, and forces them to be loyal. Our goal was to spread fear. But not the ordinary kind of fear, which one might feel they can escape; we wanted to create the deep kind of fear bordering on panic and terror, one that is inescapable, where victims succumb completely. When fear like that takes hold, you have a submissive population which will keep quiet and won't dare to speak up for the rest of their lives".

Joseph Visarionovitch Stalin, when asked what was the best and easiest way to rule, with love or fear, replied: "With fear, because love passes, but fear is eternal". And the poet Jovan Dučić in his philosophical essay wrote: "To live in fear, means to die a hundred times daily". It is true that fear makes people obedient and feel insignificant, and hatred rips apart the heart and the mind.

The German philosopher Friedrich Hegel wrote that one should never try to run from the truth. Mirko Jeleč seems to have taken Hegel's advice and made great efforts to tell the truth exactly as it was in his stories, documentary prose, and extensive footnotes. In his story the author draws the reader into a state where human suffering and loss are rougher and more intense, and all of this, layered in complexity and with rich descriptions, leads us therefore to the truth and to the unfortunate world in which we are living. I also read somewhere that the truth isn't politically useful, and that politicians lie whenever they can to keep themselves in power and to suppress and enslave their peoples further. In these times, our politicians have minimal education and no etiquette one learns at home, but they have great privileges and they do what they can to further subdue working and non-working people alike.

In this difficult task of reading through extensive materials, searching for reliable sources and witnesses of that miserable time (just the transcripts from The Hague Tribunal go over a thousand pages), Mirko Jeleč began with

the desire to write this unbiased documentary prose which talks about the absurdity of an unnecessary war and the fates of ordinary people who, guiltless, became its victims. And the democrats in power make consistent efforts to control the past so that they can rule with ease in the present and in the future. Basically, all the politicians, and unfortunately most people on all three sides, celebrate their war criminals to appease their own actions. They haven't learnt their lesson from the ancient Greeks who would, upon ending their internal wars, exclaim "Look what unfortunately we did to them!" And they haven't learnt anything from the ancient Romans who would conquer territories and then spread fraternity, not fear and hatred.

Mirko Jeleč has written a book that won't be appealing to nationalists and the politicians in power. But this book, written in an easy and simple style, succinctly, but powerfully, with lots of spirit, is an irrefutable account of the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the horrors that happened there. The consequences of the war in the devastated Bosnia are huge: a hundred thousand Muslims, Serbs, and Croats killed, two million people displaced, and three decades of parties in power which are leading us into an endless abyss. We should pass, with bowed heads, by all the execution sites with the responsibility to never forget what this nationalist and brother-killing hatred brought us to.

With these stories the author has paid his debt to his hometown where romantic snowflakes don't fall anymore, but a snowstorm rages which has disoriented many souls from the town on three rivers. Mirko Jeleč is now a resident of Vancouver in Canada, with a soul from Doboj and that soul is the mild and gentle soul of the old, pre-war town which was proud of its freedom, justice, truth, and love of man towards fellow man.

Savo Petrović
Saint Petersburg, February 2022

Savo Petrović was born 1942 in Osječani near Doboj. He completed his studies in Serbo-Croatian/Croatian-Serbian language and Yugoslav literature. He was a journalist, a technical editor, the editor-in-chief of the regional news "Glas komuna" in Doboj, and then an editor and correspondent for "Zadrugar", a Sarajevo paper. He was also a correspondent for "Politika" and Radio Belgrade. In his fruitful journalistic career, and from 1961 to May 1992 and the beginnings of the war, he published over ten thousand articles

in around twenty papers throughout Yugoslavia. He published his poetry in "Telegram" (Zagreb), "Mladost" (Belgrade), "Naši dani" (Sarajevo), "Student" (Belgrade), and also in the magazines "Značenja" (Doboj), "Život" (Sarajevo), "Književnik" (Banja Luka), and "Sarajevske sveske" (Sarajevo). He was one of the founders of the publishing library called "Paralele" in Doboj, and one of the initiators of the magazine "Značenja". In May 1992, he escaped to Germany, and then to the United States of America. Today he lives and works in Saint Petersburg, Florida. He publishes articles for some of the most-visited websites by ex-Yugoslav people. He writes poetry, lyrical prose, and critical essays on books.

Bibliography:"Balada o dječaku", Biblioteka "Paralele", Doboj (1962); "Kroz moje prste Bosna protiče", Savo Petrović-Ferid Čehić, "Knjiga drugova", a collection of poems by four poets from Doboj: Kasim Deraković, Rajko Skvarica, Ferid Čehić and Savo Petrović (2012); "Otvorena vrata", a collection of poems to be sung for the lost nation of the South Slavs, Sarajevo (2013); "Hiljadu osmijeha i jedna tuga", a collection of articles, poetic evocations, reports, essays, and memoir prose of life in the diaspora, and a remembrance of the past in Doboj (2014); "Ovdje su živjeli dobri ljudi", a book containing articles, reports and texts, published by Art print Banja Luka and Electronic Newspaper Belgrade, Banja Luka (2017); "Moji saputnici", a book containing articles of people and contemporaries, published by Art print Banja Luka, XXZ Magazin Belgrade and Tačno.net Mostar (2019); "Ugašena adresa", a memoir of Yugoslavia and authors from Doboj, Art print Banja Luka (2022);"Sa dna bunara", poems, (together with his daughter Maya Petrovich), Planjax, Tešanj (2023); "Zapisi o knjigama", essays and book reviews, Art print Banja Luka (2024).

Translator's Note

These stories, translated into English for the first time, are the un-politicised and raw accounts of the lived experience of individuals from the town of Doboj during the first year of the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina - 1992. When one thinks of this war, the first images that come to mind are of the Siege of Sarajevo, or the Srebrenica Genocide. These pillars of wartime horror have rightly dominated discourse. However, the stories of individuals who suffered similar atrocities in towns all over the country simply aren't well, if at all, known. They have been suppressed, have lacked resources and support, or trauma has made them too hard to tell.

By translating this book - originally written in Bosnian - English readers have the opportunity to understand the real and lasting effects of the war on the ordinary people who were forced to live through it.

It may be helpful for the reader to know that the stories are not in historical chronological order, and can be read standalone. When referring to footnotes, however, some acronyms, slang, and explanations of names have been included for certain stories but omitted from others. This is to avoid unnecessary repetition.

Some things in the text are culturally specific, such as the implications of people's names, and haven't been individually elaborated upon, which would require hundreds or thousands of footnotes. Usually in the Balkans one is supposedly able to identify what "religion" or "ethnic" background one belongs to based on their first or last name. This informs the understanding of the text. In former Yugoslavia there was less focus on the religious significance of people's names but this became an important tool in differentiating peoples during the war. Many stories illustrate the fact that people with undesirable names were easily identifiable as undesirable people (or the other way round). Names also convey the real life subtleties in the interconnectedness of everyone within the given communities *despite* their names, such as peaceful cohabitation of multiple religions without any concern for religious back-

ground. Christian (orthodox or catholic) names are *usually* from Abrahamic Religions, or from Slavic languages (the equivalent in English being names such as Faith, Hope, Rowan, Robin, etc). For example, Ivan or Jovan (John), Marija (Mary), Slobodan (Free *male*), Zora (Dawn) etc, *or* from other languages, such as Tamara, Marina, or Filip. Muslim names are *usually* from the Arabic language (Lejla, Mustafa, Safija), and also draw from Abrahamic religions, but written as they would be pronounced in an Islamic-Slavic way e.g. David is Davud, Mary is Merima. To add to the confusion, people of the Islamic faith would also name their children names from the Slavic language, or from other languages, such as Sabina, Elvis, or Armin.

Other culturally specific things, such clothing and beverages, where translation would be awkward, have been kept in the original and are explained in the footnotes. I have rendered the names of military organisations, political parties, buildings, and nicknames into English in most instances for ease of understanding.

Asja Suljić

Biographies

Mirko Jeleč was born in 1956 in Makljenovac, Bosnia and Herzegovina. After studying his maternal language and Yugoslav literature he worked as a journalist at Radio-Doboj, and from 1981 to the start of the war he was the editor and correspondent for Radio-Sarajevo. He works as a publicist and writes short journalistic-literary forms and articles. He has published a collection of essays called "Čekaonica za snove" (The Waiting Room for Dreams, 2011), the monography "Makljenovac, put u prošlost – povratak u budućnost" (Makljenovac – A Journey Back in Time – Returning To The Future, 2013). He created an anthology of works by diaspora from Doboj named "Preživjele riječi" (Surviving Words, 2018). In 2022 he released the book "Devedeset druga" (Nineteen ninety-two) which in a short time was published in two editions. His collection of short stories "Trun u oku" (A Speck in the Eye) was published in 2024. Today he lives and works in Vancouver.

The cover of the book was illustrated by the academic painter, with a Master's in Graphic Design, **Jadranko Durmić**. He was born in 1950 in Poljanice, Bosnia. He completed the High School of Applied Arts in Sarajevo. After that, he studied at the Academy of Fine Arts in Sarajevo, in Zagreb, and at the Royal Academy in Brussels. Mr. Durmić explored fine art and graphic design under the tutelage of Professor Frane Par in Zagreb. He has had over a hundred presentations of his artworks in Bosnia and around the world. His art works have been exhibited in the library of the Metropolitan Museum in New York. He lives and works in Munich. The paintings and graphic works of Jadranko Durmić are characterised by a multilayered meaning, ranging from fantastic realism to surrealism, science fiction, and abstraction.

Asja Suljić was born in Doboj in February 1992. She emigrated with her family to Sydney, Australia, in 1993 where she grew up. In 2008 she moved with her family to Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, where she completed

high school and university, studying a BA and MA in Music – Piano Performance at The Music Academy of Sarajevo. She also completed a Postgraduate Degree in Collaborative Piano at The Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama in Cardiff. She has lived and worked in Cardiff, Sydney, Sarajevo, and London, primarily as a teacher and pianist. She is native bilingual in English and Bosnian. "Nineteen Ninety-Two" is her first translation project.

Mirko Jeleč's book, based on facts, court documentation, testimonies of unbiased witnesses, aims to protect the one and only truth from oblivion, the truth of the ordinary persons exposed to threats, prison, and concentration camps, fearing for their life. This kind of truth from war in Bosnia, untarnished by political manipulation, is narrated in 25 stories written in simple and clear language. It is documentary prose genre, where the narratives are intertwined with facts, written accounts, and the author's own perspectives of the events. The book is embellished by its moderation, righteousness, truthfulness, and beautiful style. It looks for the best in man, despite their nationality or religious background. This book is cathartic and cleanses us from hatred, and opens up new levels of understanding.

Prof. Sead Alić

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In this difficult task of reading through extensive materials, searching for reliable sources and witnesses of that miserable time (just the transcripts from The Hague Tribunal go over a several thousand pages), Mirko Jeleč began with the desire to write this unbiased documentary prose which talks about the absurdity of an unnecessary war and the fates of ordinary people who, guiltless, became its victims. Mirko Jeleč has written a book that won't be appealing to nationalists and the politicians in power. But this book, written in an easy and simple style, succinctly, but powerfully, with lots of spirit, is an irrefutable account of the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the horrors that happened there. The consequences of the war in the devastated Bosnia are huge: a hundred thousand Muslims, Serbs, and Croats killed, two million people displaced, and three decades of parties in power which are leading us into an endless abyss.

Savo Petrović

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